

ENGLISH OPINIONS OF FRENCH POETRY

1660-1750

BY

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**TO
MY PARENTS**

PREFACE

BEFORE attempting a discussion of the subject at hand, it is well to consider preliminary questions of method of treatment, which will explain our later presentation of the study itself.

In deciding upon a point of departure for this study, it was necessary to find indications of the early attitude of England towards French poetry, through the earliest monuments of English criticism. A consideration of the early English literature itself shows a marked French influence, manifested not only in an identity of the literary monuments of the two countries, as, for instance, in the great *Roland*, the works of Marie de France and Chrestien de Troyes, and the *Roman de la Rose*, but, as well, in the adherence to French models on the part of English writers as late as the days of Wyatt and Surrey,¹ who followed Desportes and Marot almost as closely as they did Petrarch. During these centuries we may take the living evidences of approval in lieu of written criticism, all the more in view of the fact that such literary criticisms were then of the rarest occurrence. It is not until the English Renaissance that English taste asserted itself in its true character, more freed from foreign influences of spirit and form.

In determining a date for the appearance of poetic criticism in England, I take as authority Charles Gildon, who tells us in his *Laws of Poetry*, that . . . "it was very late before criticism came into England," introducing itself when it did come, through Sir Philip Sidney's

¹ L. L. Kastner, "The Elizabethan Sonneteers and the French Poets," *Mod. Lang. Review*, 1907, Vol. 3, pp. 268-277.

Apology of Poesy, and Ben Jonson's *Art of Poetry*, in which latter work Horace is directly followed. Then, continues Gildon, there was nothing until the Restoration, when the first attempts were very faulty. These earlier works consist in "some prefaces," and the works of Dryden, Buckingham, Roscommon, and Rymer.

The reasons, therefore, for taking as the date of our opening chapter the Restoration and the age of Dryden, are that it marks the beginning of modern English literary criticism, furnishing us with many texts, while the only pieces of formal criticism preceding it are the two referred to by Gildon. The documents we find, furthermore, are reliable. Finally, along with the development of criticism, follows the growth of a reading public, becoming more and more ready to take part in the formulation of the national taste.

It being necessary for me in some way to limit my work, as a careful survey of the entire field of English criticism expressed on French poetry, from Dryden's day until contemporary times, seemed too vast an undertaking for one piece of single-handed research, I found the time of the height of Pope's activity a convenient stopping place, since it marks the point where the second wave of foreign influence ebbed in the matter of English poetical creeds; and, with the spirit of Chatterton and Coleridge, the second appearance of stock-British taste vigorously asserted itself, this time through a well formed, well founded literary public.

In presenting the material found, I have, in each chapter, stated completely one side of the case before beginning a consideration of the other. In other words, I have preferred to draw a complete picture of the favorable criticism, in all its phases and aspects, before presenting an uninterrupted survey of the unfavorable, rather than to treat both sides alternately in regard to any one poetic or dramatic characteristic. In this manner, the

import and the force of the criticism in each case is the more readily appreciated.

Finally, keeping uppermost in mind the desire to present a true and clear picture of the English opinion of French poetry, quite as it existed during the period in question, I have chosen as far as possible to incorporate into my text the very words of the critics, in the form of quotations.² The large number of these quotations, then, is intentional. It is the judgment of this time that is the subject of our study, and the individual opinions that form it must be left to speak for themselves. I have, therefore, collected such opinions as are important for our purpose; and have endeavored to present them in such a manner that they may assert themselves to the greatest effect. It is only then that I have allowed myself to interpret the sum total of these results, accounting for the views expressed by reasons of politics and the like.

This study will at some future time be supplemented by investigations into the subsequent English opinion of French poetry, from 1750 up to the present day.

It affords me keen pleasure to be enabled thus publicly to express my gratitude to those who have helped me in preparing my thesis. I wish to thank:

Professor Raymond Weeks, of Columbia University, under whose guidance my studies first became directed towards the subject I have treated, and who has shown a most kindly interest in my work.

Professor John L. Gerig, of Columbia University, for his ever-ready counsels, which have given me the greatest aid in preparing my material, and in developing an impartial and critical point of view for its presentation; and for the assuring confidence with which he has honored me.

² In the quotations the spelling found in the text has been retained, but no attempt has been made to follow the original use of italics.

Professor Henry A. Todd, of Columbia University, whose advice and encouragement have gone far towards removing many of the obstacles besetting my path.

Professor William P. Trent and Professor John Erskine, of Columbia University, who, although not of the department in which this thesis is offered, have allowed me to feel free to discuss my work with them, and have given me material help.

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My Mother, whose valuable suggestions and keen criticisms have afforded me much help, and whose loving encouragement has been my greatest incentive.

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ENGLISH OPINIONS OF FRENCH POETRY

CHAPTER I

DRYDEN'S APPRECIATION OF THE FRENCH CLASSIC THEATRE

THE criticisms expressed by seventeenth-century England on contemporary French poetry deal almost exclusively with the dramatic poetry of the classic theatre. As regards non-dramatic poetry, there was little produced in France that could arouse much interest. Lyric poetry was on the wane. After 1597 the poems of the Pléiade appeared less and less frequently in the "recueils de poésie choisie" and it has been said, indeed, that between 1600 and 1626, not one of Ronsard's poems was published in such anthologies.¹ The Pléiade had fallen into obscurity, and few penetrated into the dark beyond. The work of the two seventeenth century lyric schools—that of Malherbe, engaged chiefly in the polishing and repolishing of verse forms and word forms; and the coterie of the *libertins*, headed by the unfettered Théophile de Viau—offered features which, though interesting in themselves, are not strong enough to hold their own against the white light of the all-surpassing classic drama. The satiric and critical poems that appeared later in the century were

¹ The first record we find of Ronsard's poems appearing in these verse collections is the *Recueil des plus belles pièces des poètes français*, published by Fontenelle in 1692, which contains thirty-four of his "poésies amoureuses." (Fuchs, "Comment les XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles ont jugé Ronsard"; *Revue de la Renaissance*, 1908, vol. 9, pp. 24-27.)

treated by their English critics from the point of view of their content, and quite apart from much recognition of their poetic form. La Fontaine received but little attention. Lady Winchilsea modelled her *Fables* upon his; but beyond this, and an occasional scanty reference (where his poems are mentioned without comment) he seems hardly to be regarded at all.

As to the earlier poetry, very little seemed to be known about it at this time in France itself. Boileau, in his *Art Poétique*, merely mentions Villon, Marot and Ronsard, but further than this, the general knowledge of the lyric past of France, such knowledge as could easily circulate and penetrate beyond the frontiers without deep investigation or study, seems negligible.

French poetry of this time is almost synonymous with the more important dramatic poetry. It is dramatic poetry that spread across the frontiers of France, and all criticisms of poetry in the time in question deal with it before all else. In our study of the reception that French poetry was accorded in England we shall, then, be busied primarily with the treatment that the dramatic poetry of France met at the hands of Restoration England.

The court of Charles I. had left behind it a heritage of interest in the French drama. Henrietta Maria favored the taking over into English of French dramatic elements, and in 1637 Rutter's translation of the *Cid* was favorably received at the English court but shortly after its French publication.² This was the beginning of a mani-

² Dorothy Canfield, *Corneille and Racine in England*, N. Y., 1904, pp. 5-6.

"In regard to the partiality of the Queen for French dramatic literature, it must be remembered that at this time the English stage was not in a condition to arouse any enthusiasm in even the most broad-minded of French women. Shakespeare was gone, Ben Jonson's pedantic severity, the horrors of the tragedy of that time, and the grossness of the comedy, were not attractive qualities to one fresh from Paris."

festation of interest through translation which, though not so prevalent at this moment, was to grow into prominence only a short while later.

Many of the Cavaliers, accustomed to the influences of Charles's court and fleeing from the powers that overthrew it, sought refuge in France. Contemporary opinion deemed the Parisian finishing touch necessary for the "perfect cavalier." Says John Evelyn,³ ". . . that our traveller may have . . . time and resolution to conquer the language, and go through those hardy and most eminent exercises which are there to be learned in their choicest perfection and native lustre; after which . . . he may return home, and be justly reputed a most accomplished Cavalier." Again he speaks of ". . . Paris, where indeed I would have the principal abode of a Gentleman to be . . ." (p. 50) and remarks in its praise, "I think no city in the whole world equalizes it. . . . This I will boldly affirm, that for the streets, suburbs, and common buildings, it infinitely excels any city elsewhere in Europe . . ." (pp. 92, 93).

The literary fashions brought back to England by the Cavaliers upon their return from France are of the greatest importance to us. The English, tiring of the fantastic excesses of the Elizabethan age and the early seventeenth century, jaded by their civil wars and their religious controversies, and needing a clear prose to express their new scientific and economic achievements, were naturally prepared to give a more favorable reception to French literature, including its drama and poetry, than they might otherwise have been when Charles and the Cavaliers returned from France. In other words, the court party had a good soil to work upon, especially as the robust anglicanism of writers of Milton's stamp was in disrepute.

³ John Evelyn, *The State of France*, Edition Upcott. London, 1825. Foreword, p. 51.

Gallant poetry as it flourished in the polished salons of Paris, with its ideal "une pensée délicate dans une forme facile et harmonieuse"⁴ found favor with English nobility of the stamp of Sedley, Rochester, Buckingham, and Newcastle. Conventions of the type of "Tendre"⁵ with anagrammatic and mythological names were popular. But of greatest importance was the influence of the French stage.

One valuable effect of the Restoration was the re-opening of the theatres.⁶ The two licenses to organize troupes of actors were both issued by royal favor to recently returned Cavaliers,—D'Avenant and Killigrew. In the opinion of Charlanne,⁷ "C'est donc du côté du roi et de la cour que s'orientent la littérature en général et le drame en particulier: c'est une rupture avec le passé." There are indications as well that this influence was to last. In a note on Shadwell's *Impertinents*, played at Dover in 1670, when the King journeyed there to meet his sister, the Duchess of Orleans, Downes (*Roscius Anglicanus*, p. 29) tells us that the actors dressed in a fashion "to ape the French," and please the court. The same author relates that around 1700, Thomas Betterton was put to an enormous expense importing French actors and dancers "to gratify the desires and fancies of the nobility and gentry" (p. 46). It is further remarked that these performances were pleasing to the court.

⁴ A. Beljame, *Le public et les hommes de lettres en Angleterre au dix-huitième siècle, 1660-1744*; Paris, 1897, p. 10.

⁵ "Tendre," a map planned by Mademoiselle de Scudéry charting the sea of the affections, indicating the various degrees of sentiment passed through before arriving at the highest goal of "tendre," and distinguishing the right from the wrong way of proceeding,

⁶ A. Beljame, *op. cit.*, p. 30. "L'organisation des théâtres fut donc une des premières affaires d'état dont s'occupa Charles II."

⁷ L. Charlanne, *L'Influence française en Angleterre*, Paris, 1906, p. 82.

Further, we find that Charles attended the theatres himself, which proved an innovation, his predecessors having ordered the troupes of players to come to them to make their appearances. And in his interest in the theatre "Charles n'était pas seulement un spectateur amusé et un protecteur généreux, il devenait volontiers un conseiller écouté, un guide littéraire qui, à tort ou à raison, faisait autorité . . ." (Charlanne, p. 79.) Dryden defends a fault in *The Virgin Queen* by declaring that it pleased the king, the best judge. Finally, Roger Boyle, the Earl of Orrery, comments, in a letter, upon the *Black Prince*, his first play:

"I have just now finished a play in the French manner; because I heard the king declare himself more in favor of their way of writing than ours; my poor attempt cannot please his Majesty, but my example may incite others who can . . ."

The king's favoring French literary conventions, the interest evinced in them by the nobility, and the sudden flourishing of the stage could have but one result—the "frenchifying" to a marked degree of the English stage.

A number of important Restoration plays found their immediate sources in the French plays so favorably regarded by the King and the Court, and translations and adaptations of the French abounded.⁸ Furthermore, the Restoration marks the beginning of the foothold that Corneille and Racine were to gain on the English stage mainly through translation, although we shall see that the originals were not unfamiliar to those whose taste set the standard in literary fashion. "The reign of Charles II. was the golden period of translation from

⁸ For excellent lists of these plays see Canfield, *Corneille and Racine in England, Appendix*; and Margaret Sherwood, *Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practice*, Boston, 1898, p. 7.

French tragedies. . . . Their efforts [the nobles'] to introduce French ways of thought into English literature lose an element of artificiality if they are regarded as spontaneous and as a result of their own taste, even if this taste was an acquired one."⁹

This wealth of translation, however, was a Restoration florescence; with the death of Charles II. there occurred a period of inaction among translators. These translations were regarded, then, not, as is often the case in our own day, as borrowed adaptations, but they were incorporated into the body of English literature. "The attempt of the translators of the Restoration was not primarily to make plays out of French tragedies, but English works of literature out of French masterpieces." (Canfield, p. 30.)

Along with these translations and adaptations, there is evidence of the interest shown in French dramatic influences by Restoration England in the form of lamentations—from writers less under the trans-Channel spell for fear that French literary customs might supplant British ones in the hearts of the noble judges.

"With sickly actors and an old house, too,
We're matched with glorious theatres and new,
And with our ale-house scenes and clothes bare worn,
Can neither raise old plays nor new adorn.
If all these ills could not undo us quite,
A brisk French troop is grown your dear delight;
Who with broad bloody bills call you each day,
To laugh and break your buttons at their play;
Or see some serious piece which we presume
Is fallen from some incomparable plume;

.

We dare not on your privilege intrench,
Or ask you why you like them?—They are French."
(Dryden, Prologue to *Arviragus and Philicia*.)

⁹ Canfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 29.

And again,

"Whate'er our hot-brained sheriffs did advance,
Was, like our fashions, first produced in France:
And, when worn out, well scourg'd, and banish'd there,
Sent over like their godly beggars here."

(Dryden, Prologue to *The Duke of Guise*.)¹⁰

Samuel Butler takes his place under these standards, regretting sincerely and vociferously the extravagant imitation of all things French during the reign of Charles II. It is beyond doubt that the English

"Admire whate'er they find abroad,
But nothing here, though e'er so good."
(*Satire on our Ridiculous Imitation of the French*.)

The literary and dramatic tastes of the King and the Court party were eminently French. Charles was unwilling to conceive of ideas of the theatre different from those in vogue in France; he preferred plays "*dans le goût français*" to all others,¹¹ and in these he admired particularly the observance of rules, the dignity of the personages, and the beauty of the rhyme. These conventions flourished, since they represented the King's taste.

The currents we have been following represent those of the Court. "*La bourgeoisie, convaincue de Puritanisme, fut brutalement mise à l'écart, annihilée; la cour prit toute la place au soleil, et tout se régla sur elle, adopta ses goûts et ses amusements.*"¹² The middle class, less cosmopolitan and not at all subjected to French influences,

¹⁰ Further (Dryden, Epilogue to *The Wild Gallant*):

"Our poet yields you should this play refuse
As tradesmen, by the change of fashion lose
With some content their fripperies of France,
In hope it may their staple trade advance."

¹¹ From a letter cited in the Preface to the *Dramatic Works* of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery.

¹² A. Beljame, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

were slower to burrow their way out of the Puritan snows. Even after Charles had sanctioned the opening of the theatres, many of the bourgeoisie still regarded them as houses of iniquity, and hesitated to frequent them. The spectacles witnessed by the people were still of a primitive nature. On June 16, 1670, John Evelyn attended an entertainment of this sort at the Bear-Garden. He quite naturally takes no pleasure in cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and bull-baiting, and styles it "butcherly, barbarously cruel, rude, and dirty."¹⁸ Although opposition to the court tastes was not confined to the burgher class which was little lettered, yet the scant following of Bunyan and Milton give almost no voice to their poetic beliefs at this time.

Thus we see formed at the period of the Restoration divergent standards of poetic criticism. It will be the purpose of this study to follow both currents of this criticism as it is expressed on the poetry of France, in order to determine at a later time the tendency of English opinion regarding French poetry as a whole.

* * *

As we have inferred from the attitude of the aristocracy, cordial relations existed between the courts of England and France. During the winter of 1660-1661 the Queen mother visited England, returning to France in January, 1661; in March of the same year, the cousin of John Evelyn was sent to France "to condole the death of Mazarine [sic];" the following year (January, 1662) "Monseignor [sic] Morus preached before Court in French."¹⁹ Still later (1664) at "a magnificent triumph by water and land of the Lord Maior, Sir John Lawrence, . . . my Lord Maior came twice up to us, first

¹⁸ Evelyn, *Memoirs*, Edition Bray, London, 1827, p. 322, vol. 2.

¹⁹ The Bray edition of the *Memoirs of John Evelyn* (vol. II.) from which these quotations are taken, gives the following note on Morus: "Probably Alexander Morus, the antagonist of Milton."

drinking in the golden goblett his Majesty's health, then the French King's, as a compliment to the Ambassador."

Relations such as these augured well for the reception to be accorded those principles which France had to bestow upon the world of art. We have been concerned thus far with determining the existence of the interest shown by the nobility in French plays. Let us now consider how the presented plays, as well as other literary conventions, were received, and proceed at length to a study of the reasons supporting their popularity.

We may believe that translations out of the French, particularly of the nobler tragedies, were cordially received. "French plays were acclaimed with favor in London."² Not one of these plays, irrespective of its merits as a piece of translation, was a failure. The English version of *Heraclius* (probably Carlell's) was quite successful both in 1664 and in 1666. Pepys praised it and the nobles waxed enthusiastic about its merits. John Dancer's *Nicomedes* of 1671 met with approval at the time in Dublin, and Genest says laconically ". . . it is not a bad play."³ Mrs. Philips's translation of *Pompey* in 1663 received an ovation both in Dublin and in London, and grew to find itself quite the sensation of the day. It continued to find favor as late as 1668 and won success as a book-play as well, when it appeared in

² Canfield, *op. cit.*, p. 33. Again (pp. 16-17): "The French stage was in a position of undisputed authority and in all the freshness of the first glow of its golden period. Corneille stood unapproached by any rival, and of all French tragic poets, he is the one most calculated to inspire admiration in the English mind. His greatest plays were all written at this time [that of the English civil wars] and his force and power and lofty dignity were eminently calculated to prevent British minds from dwelling on the un-English details of rhymed Alexandrines and the observance of the unities."

³ John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage*, 1832, vol. X, p. 271.

1667, 1669, 1678, and 1710, in editions of Mrs. Philips' works.

Lest we think that this interest confined itself to French poetry become anglicized, contemporary evidence shows that a knowledge of French was an integral part of a "polite education." Special mention is often made of gentlewomen who knew none but their own language. Ballard⁴ comments on Lady Chudleigh's ". . . being taught no other language but her native tongue"; and of Catherine Bovey he says, ". . . I am not positively assured that this worthy gentlewoman was either a linguist or a writer." French poetry was read and some of the more ambitious ladies gave themselves up to translating and even writing it. "Soon after her death [Mrs. Katherine Philips] her poems and translations were collected and published in a volume in folio, with the following title: *Poems by the most deservedly admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the matchless Orinda. To which is added Monsieur Corneille's Pompey and Horace, Tragedies. With several other translations out of French*, London, 1677 . . ." (Ballard, p. 294). Among the works of Esther Inglis, a learned lady who lived early in the seventeenth century, we find *Les Six Vingts et Six Quatrains de Guy de Faur, Sieur de Pybrac, escrits par Esther Inglis, pour son dernier adieu*. (Ballard, p. 268.) Mrs. Aphra Behn followed the models of *Tendre* and *La Montre* of Bonnecourse, and gives as subtitle to *The Golden Age*, "a paraphrase on a translation out of French." (*Poems Upon Several Occasions*.) Lady Winchilsea, among the best known of the women poets, shows a marked influence from France, her *Fables*, the most noteworthy perhaps of all her works, being based entirely upon those of La Fontaine. If we admit the weight of this evidence to prove that French poetry was well received among the

⁴ G. Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, London, 1752.

upper classes of Restoration England, we may turn to a consideration of the reasons for this popularity, gleaned from contemporary documents.

French was the classic language of the times. Says Sir Charles Sedley,

"Now Gallants, most of you are so well bred,
French has long since chas'd Latin from your Head." ⁵

Interesting in this connection is Samuel Butler's summing up of the result of French influence in matters of language.

"For though to smatter ends of Greek
Or Latin be the rhetorique
Of pedants counted, and vain-glorious,
To smatter French is meritorious."
(*Satire upon our Ridiculous Imitation of the French.*)

As a poetic medium Dryden awarded the first place to Italian, ranked French next, and English last. "The English has yet more natural disadvantages than the French; our original Teutonick consisting most in monosyllables, and those encumbered with consonants, which cannot possibly be freed from those inconveniences. . . . But, on the other hand, the effeminacy of our pronunciation (a defect common to us, and to the Danes), and our scarcity of female rhimes, have left the advantage of musical composition for songs, though not for recitative, to our neighbors." ⁶

And further in the Preface to *Albion and Albanus*, Dryden gives voice to a discovery. "The English, I confess, are not so musical as the French." Not only does

⁵ *The Mistris*, Epilogue, Sedley's Works, London, 1722, 2 vols.

⁶ *Albion and Albanus*, Preface. Again, in the Dedication to *Troilus and Cressida* we find, "We are full of monosyllables and those clogg'd with consonants, and our pronunciation is effeminate. All of which are enemies to founding a language. 'Tis true, to supply our poverty, we have traffick'd with our neighbor nations. . . ."

he find English inadequate for poetry (with the tacit admission that "poetry" means the un-English rhyme) but he regrets the lack of any system of standardizing and purifying it, similar to the one furnished by the French Academy. "Only I am sorry that (speaking so noble a language as we do) we have not a more certain measure of it, as they have in France, where they have an Academy . . ." (*Rival Ladies*, Epistle Dedicatory).

The salient feature of the French classic tragedy is its adherence to the rules of the unities. The dual nature of the time with which we are dealing, "a time of battle between French rules of order, regularity, symmetry, and the apparent lawlessness of the English practise,"⁷ is readily seen in the utterly divergent views of some of its commentators. For the moment, though, let us confine ourselves to that criticism which showed itself favorable to French institutions.

The sympathy which the unities won in England was based upon the fundamental assumption that obedience to these rules meant that closer imitation of nature which is the aim of poetry, and not infrequently the ideas of nearness to nature and adherence to the rules are used synonymously. Dryden tells of that play being "nearest to Nature whose action is within twenty-four hours."⁸ Again, in his *Essay on Satire*, Dryden agrees with Aristotle in that tragedy is the most perfect work of poetry because it is most unified and most rigidly bound by the rules of action, time, and place.⁹

This then is the attitude that we find the foremost

⁷ M. Sherwood, *Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practise*, p. 6.

⁸ These rules are the chief means by which the Ancients, Jonson, and Corneille succeeded in imitating Nature, "derived from the authority of Aristotle and Horace, and from the rules and examples of Ben Jonson and Corneille." *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

⁹ We are aware, making Dryden our chief authority, of his fluctuating views. We believe, though, that Dryden's instability in matters literary, as well as politic, hinged directly upon the

playwright of the Restoration accepting for the time being. He is a disciple of Corneille's, a friend of the rules, and of those who uphold them.

"Quotations are superfluous in an establish'd truth. Otherwise I could reckon up among the Moderns, all the Italian commentators on Aristotle's *Book of Poetry*; and amongst the French, the greatest of this age, Boileau and Rapin: The latter of which is alone sufficient, were all other criticks lost, to teach anew the rules of writing."¹⁰

Gerard Langbaine emphasizes Dryden's debt to the French stage:

"But for comedy he is for the most part beholding to French Romances and Plays, not only for his plots, but even a great part of his language; tho' at the same time he has the confidence to prevaricate, if not flatly deny the accusation and equivocally to defend himself."¹¹

While Charlanne styles him "Le plus grand vulgarisateur de la doctrine et du talent de Despréaux" (p. 314).

Dryden sets forth the following plan for himself in the Prologue to *Secret Love or the Maiden Queen*:

"He who writ this, not with out pains or thought,
From French and English theatres has brought
Th' exactest rules by which a play is wrought.
The Unities of action, place and time,
The scenes unbroken; and a mingled chime
Of Jonson's humour and Corneille's rhyme."

And again:

"For what else concerns this play, I would tell the views, or possible change of views, of the party in power. We feel secure in citing him, therefore, less as a study of Dryden himself, than as a representative of contemporary opinion, whichever way it leaned.

¹⁰ *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, Preface, A Defence of Heroick Poetry.

¹¹ *Account of English Dramatic Poets*, 1691, John Dryden, Esq., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Spingarn, vol. III, pp. 110-147.

reader that it is regular, according to the strictest of dramatic laws, but that it is a commendation which many of our poets now despise, and a beauty which our common audiences do not easily discern." (*Secret Love*, Preface.)¹²

We find Dryden agreeing with the classic traditions of keeping comedy and tragedy apart: "Too many accidents incumber the poet . . . for the variety of Passions which they produce are ever crossing and justling each other out of the way. He who treats of joy and grief together is in a fair way of causing neither of those effects." (*Troilus and Cressida*, Preface.) And finally, besides advocating and practising the rules, he defends them against attack, using the authority of a French critic:

"But because many men are shocked at the name of rules, as if they were a kind of Magisterial Prescription upon poets, I will conclude with the words of Rapin, in his *Reflections on Aristotle's Work of Poetry*. If the rules be well consider'd, we shall find them to be made only to reduce Nature into Method, to trace her step by step, and not to suffer the least mark of her to escape us. . . . But 'tis evident by the ridiculous mistakes and gross absurdities, which have been made by those poets who have taken their fancy only for their guide, that if this fancy be not regulated, 't is a meer caprice, and utterly incapable to produce a reasonable and judicious poem." (*Ibid.*)

After the rigorous rules of the French classic drama, the trait most likely to form a point of contention in English minds is the use of the rhymed Alexandrine. That feelings ran high on this point is shown by the

¹² As a further example (*Troilus and Cressida*, Preface): ". . . I made with no small trouble, an order and connexion of all the scenes: . . . a due proportion of time allowed for every motion."

warm presentation of both sides of the case in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (which we shall have occasion to consider later). Dryden himself favors rhyme, opposes it, and again looks kindly upon it.¹³

As we have already suggested, each view that Dryden puts forth has value as representative of some important current of contemporary opinion, if it has none as an example of constancy to any given principle on the part of the writer himself.

Dryden offers several arguments in favor of the French rhymed tragedy: ". . . it must be granted, rhyme has all the advantages of prose, besides its own. . . . The advantages of rhyme over blank verse are so many, that it were lost time to name them." (*Rival Ladies*, Epistle Dedic.) And again, "You would have him [the dramatist] follow Nature, but he must follow her on foot; you have dismounted him from his Pegasus." i. e., in opposing rhyme. (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.) Rhyme is an aid to memory, an added grace in writing, and a curb to unbridled fancy.

¹³ The following table is calculated to represent the steps in Dryden's varying attitude towards rhyme:

The Wild Gallant, in prose.

The Rival Ladies, a small part rhymed.

The Indian Queen, entirely rhymed.

The Indian Emperor, entirely rhymed.

Secret Love, less favorable to rhyme.

Aureng-Zebe, "grows weary of his long lov'd Mistress, Rhime."

All for Love, not rhymed.

Troilus and Cressida, more French in form.

Amboyna, a mixture of rhyme and prose.

Love Triumphant, rhyme and blank verse.

Don Sebastian, presents a mixture.

Cleomenes, nearer to Shakesperian form.

There are some rhymed verses in all Dryden's plays, and some prose in all but *All for Love*. His early tendency seems to be to use prose for comic parts, and heroic rhyme for serious and pathetic parts.

"Judgment is indeed the Master workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely; at least, if the poet commits errors with this help, he would make greater and more without it: 'tis in short, a slow and painful, but the surest way of writing." (*Ibid.*) Furthermore, it does not prevent a close imitation of Nature, being "at least as natural as blank verse . . . Heroick rhyme is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse." (*Ibid.*, p. 91.)

Arguments against rhyme, he continues, reflect less upon the principle of rhyme itself, than on the bad management of an unskilled rhymester; mean writers write "meanly" in any form. ". . . if you cannot find six natural lines together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many lines in blank verse, even among the greatest of our poets." (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 89.) Furthermore, rhyme is not artificial.

"For the due choice of your words expresses your sense naturally, and the due placing of them adapts the rhyme to it. If you object that one verse may be made for the sake of another, though both the words and the rhyme be apt, I answer, it cannot possibly so fall out; for either there is a dependence of sense betwixt the first line and the second, or there is none: if there be that connection, then, in the natural position of the words the latter line must of necessity flow from the former; if there be no dependence, yet still the due ordering of the words makes the last line as natural in itself as the other: so that the necessity of a rhyme never forces any but a bad or lazy writer to say what they would not otherwise." (*Ibid.*, p. 85.)

By a faulty placing of the words blank verse may be rendered equally artificial.

The further objection, that rhyme is poorly suited to repartee, may be equally true of blank verse, where the check is placed by the measure, if not by the rhyme words:

“When a poet has found the repartee, the last perfection he can add to it, is to put it into verse. However good the thought may be, however apt the words in which ’tis couched, yet he finds himself at a little unrest, while rhyme is wanting: he cannot leave it until that comes naturally, and then is at ease, and sits down contented.” (*Ibid.*, p. 95.)

And again (*Ibid.*, p. 94): “. . . poignant brevity of repartee . . . joined with the cadences and sweetness of the rhyme, leaves nothing in the soul of the hearer to desire.”

The more elevated sentiments of tragedy, the nobler type of personage, requires a nobler form of diction, which is supplied by rhyme:

“Blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a poem, nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is by Aristotle ranked above it?” (*Ibid.*, p. 92.)

And again in the same essay (p. 84) we find: “. . . rhyme is there [in serious plays] as natural and more effectual than blank verse.”

Dryden makes short work of the views that oppose rhyme on the authority of the great Elizabethans’ use of blank verse, “. . . that because they excellently describ’d passions without rhyme, therefore rhyme was not capable of describing it. But time has now convinc’d most men of that error.” (*Essay of Heroick Plays*, printed as Preface to the *Conquest of Granada*.)

It must be remembered that the litterateurs of the nobility favored the use of rhyme. Says Dryden, continuing his defense:

“ ‘Est ubi plebs recte putat, est ubi peccat.’ Horace says it of the vulgar judging poesy. But if you mean the mixed audience of the populace and the noblesse, I dare confidently affirm that a great part of the latter sort are already favorable to verse.” (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 90.)

And as final authority for the use of rhyme we learn that “. . . the French, Italian and Spanish tragedies are generally writ in it; and sure the universal consent of the most civilized parts of the world, ought, in this as it does in other customs, to include the rest.” (*Ibid.*, p. 88.)¹⁴

Along with these definite defenses of French dramatic conventions, we find instances of the admiration in which they were held by acknowledgments that English authors had borrowed from them or modelled themselves upon them. According to Dryden, D’Avenant “. . . heightened his characters . . . from the example of Corneille and some French poets.” (*Essay of Heroick Plays*.) *Almanzor* found its inspiration, among other sources, from the “Artaban of Monsieur Calprenede.” In *Love Triumphant* Dryden followed the example of Corneille and “stretch’d the latitude to a street and a palace, not far distant from each other in the same city.” (Epistle

¹⁴ Dryden suggests as a reason for the opposition to rhyme in England that English poets “write so ill in it.” (*Ibid.*, p. 53.) Compare (Beljame, *op. cit.*, p. 41):

“ . . . on adopta la rime, qui, si elle paratt nécessaire au rythme de nos vers français, fait des vers anglais un chant lyrique insupportable dans une œuvre de longue haleine, et qui est si manifestement contraire au génie dramatique de nos voisins, que detronée par Marlowe au XVIIe siècle, les poètes de la Restauration ne purent lui donner qu’une vie factice de quelques années après lesquelles elle disparut à tout jamais du théâtre.”

Dedicatory.) Again, in the dedication to *Amphitryon*, Dryden says:

" 'Tis true, were this comedy wholly mine, I should call it a trifle, and perhaps not think it worth your patronage; but the names of Plautus and Molière are joyn'd in it; that is, the two greatest names of ancient and modern comedy . . ."

Of his *Indian Emperor* Dryden says that "'tis an irregular piece, if compared with many of Corneille's . . ." (Dedication) and begs his audiences ". . . not to compare him [i. e., *Amphitryon*] too strictly with Molière's." (Dedication.)¹⁵

The English populace is bidden to take example from the French, and enjoy the new operas:

"Then 'tis the mode of France, without whose rules,
None must presume to set up here for fools;
In France, the oldest man is ever young,
Sees operas daily, learns the tunes so long,
'Till foot, hand, head, keeps time with ev'ry song.
Each sings his part, echoing from pit and box,
With his hoarse voice, half harmony, half pox.
Le plus grand Roy du monde is always ringing;
They show themselves good subjects by their singing."

Albion and Albanus, Prologue.

The operas themselves, it must be remembered, were but recently imported from France, and enjoyed the vogue that all French dramatic innovations were accorded.¹⁶

¹⁵ Again, "Tho' Corneille is more resolute in his preface before his *Pertharite*, which was condemn'd more universally than this; for he avows boldly, that in spite of censure, his play was well and regularly written; which is more than I dare say for mine. . . ." (*Wild Gallant*, Preface.)

¹⁶ *The Spanish Fryar*, Prologue.

"The French and we still change, but here's the curse,
They change for better, and we change for worse;
They take up our old trade of conquering,
And we are taking theirs, to dance and sing:
Our fathers did, for change, to France repair,
And they, for change, will try our English air."

By way of concluding our study of those Restoration opinions that were favorable to the French classic school, let us stop a moment with the excellent résumé of these views furnished by Lisideius, who, of the four debaters in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, upholds the French. This youth is drawn after the person of Sir Charles Sedley, whose surname has been used in Latinized anagram. Lisideius, then, is representative of the Sedley coterie, and their literary creeds.

Lisideius comments, first of all, on the preëminence of the French stage, not only over that of England, but over the rest of Europe: ". . . Corneille and some other Frenchmen, reformed their theatre (which before was as much below ours, as it now surpasses it and the rest of Europe)." (P. 41.) He proceeds next to state and analyse the reasons for this preëminence. The scrupulous observance of the unities, especially of that of action, makes for greater naturalness, and is by no means dull or unvaried: ". . . they do not burden them [their plays] with underplots, as the English do; which is the reason why many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot; and we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill-wrought stuffs." (P. 42.) And again: ". . . the French afford you as much variety on the same day, but they do it not so unseasonably, or *mal a propos* as we do [in tragi-comedies']".

He cites another source of "naturalness" in the classic writer's managing of his characters upon the stage. ". . . [let] no person after his first entrance . . . ever appear, but the business which brings him upon the stage shall be evident." (P. 52.) He uses Corneille's authority for declaring it absurd for an actor to leave the stage, simply because he has nothing more to say. One character is rightly of highest importance, but the others, if less en-

grossing, are all necessary to the furthering of the play: ". . . Let him produce any one of Corneille's tragedies, wherein every person, like so many servants in a well governed family, has not some employment, and who is not necessary to the carrying on of the plot, or at least, to your understanding of it." (P. 46.)

He praises the French for using speeches to ". . . avoid the tumult to which we are subjected in England, by representing duels, battles and the like; which renders our stage too like the theatre where they fight prizes;" p. 47) and he bases this opinion on a passage from Corneille's *Discours des trois Unités*.¹⁷ He further praises French plays for drawing their sources from history—*ex noto fictum carmen sequar*—and for interweaving this historical truth with a possible fiction, thereby forming a pleasant fallacy not incompatible with nature. He contrasts them with English historical plays, even with those of Shakespeare, which, "cramping forty years into two hours, like chronicles, are miniatures rather than imitations of Nature."

Lisideius admires the French structure which never allows a mere change of will to govern the denouement:

". . . you never see any of their plays end with a conversion, or a simple change of will, which is the ordinary way which our poets use to end theirs." (P. 51.) He upholds French rhyme with arguments similar to those which we have already considered. Further in the *Essay* Dryden gives as one of the merits of Jonson's

¹⁷ "Le poète n'est pas tenu d'exposer à la vue toutes les actions particulières qui amènent à la principale: il doit choisir celles qui lui sont les plus avantageuses à faire voir, soit par la beauté du spectacle, soit par l'éclat et la véhémence des passions qu'elles produisent, soit par quelqu'autre agrément, qui leur soit attaché, et cacher les autres derrière la scène, pour les faire connaître au spectateur, ou par une narration, ou par quelqu'autre adresse de l'art."

Silent Woman, its measuring up to certain standards of excellence determined by Corneille:

"One of these advantages is that which Corneille has laid down as the greatest which can arrive to any poem, and which he himself could never compass above thrice in all his plays; viz. the making of choice of some signal and long expected day, whereon the action of the play is to depend." (Pp. 75-76.)

And finally, Lisideius says: "But I have been too long in this discourse, since the French have many other excellencies not common to us." (P. 51.)

Other critics besides Dryden show themselves favorable to the French poetry of this age. According to the comment of the Earl of Mulgrave,

"The unities of action, time, and place,
Which, if observed, give plays so great a grace,
Are, tho' but little practis'd, too well known
To be taught here; . . ."

—*Essay on Poetry.*

And again, on the question of rhyme he feels that:

"Number and rhyme and that harmonious sound,
Which never dares the ear with harshness wound
Are necessary, yet but vulgar arts. . . ."

—*Ibid.*

Besides expressing his approval of the results of classic doctrine as practised by the French, Mulgrave undertakes to classify the great poets of all time in the following order: Virgil, Horace, Spenser, Milton, Waller, Malherbe, Corneille, Boileau. (*Essay on Authors.*)

Sir John Evelyn, as we have seen, is favorable to the refining influences from France, particularly where they pertain to matters of learning or language. He mentions in this connection the super-excellence of French libraries, both private and royal, over those of Great Britain. In a letter to Sir Peter Wyche, Knight, of

June 20, 1665, Evelyn advocates several methods for improving the English language, among them:

"...that some were appointed to collect all the technical words; especially those of the more generous employments: as the author of the *Essaies des Merveilles de la Nature et des plus nobles artifices* has done for the French."

Along these same lines of language study Sir John Howell offers an interesting account of the development of French, placing the beginning of its era of polish in the midst of the reign of Philip of Valois and mentioning the help of Marot and of Ronsard. A reference such as this is all the more interesting as it is one of the rarest dealing with the pre-classic, non-dramatic authors.

Sir Robert Howard, known to us thus far as Crites, in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, speaks of the conventions of the stage and of French influences upon them.

"The serious plays were anciently compos'd of speeches and choruses, where all things are related, but no matter of fact presented on the stage. This pattern the *French* do at this time neerly follow, only leaving out the chorus, making up their plays with almost entire and discursive scenes, presenting the business in relations. This way has very much affected some of our nation who possibly believe well of it more upon the account that what the French do ought to be a fashion, than upon the reason of the thing." (Preface to *Four New Plays*, 1665.)

Champion of the ancient classicists, he chooses against rhyme in theory, and adopts it in practice, defending himself with an argument that is worth volumes of comment on the literary trend of the times.

"But while I give these arguments against verse, I may seem faulty that I have not only writ ill ones, but writ any; but since it was the fashion I was resolv'd as

in all different things, not to appear singular,—the danger of the vanity being greater than the error; and therefore I follow'd it as a fashion, though very far off."

We find Shadwell conforming to the unities, under the pressure of French authority:

"I have in this play, as neer as I could, observed the three unities of time, place, and action . . . I have here, as often as I could naturally, kept the scenes unbroken, which, though it be not so much practised or so well understood by the English, yet among the French poets is accompted a great beauty." (*Sullen Lovers*, Preface.) Wycherly and Congreve refer to French standards and models for writing.¹⁸

The attitude of the nobility, influenced by France, and ready to receive her teachings, was quite favorable to the poetry, and in particular to the dramatic poetry, which France had made known.

The opinions with which we have been dealing state but one side of the case; and Restoration England was not unanimous in her unstinted admiration for France and French poetic conventions. Outside the immediate circle of the gallant court, France was not regarded in quite so kindly a light. To gather a conception of the general attitude from matters not literary, the French peasants were thought "seldom or never [to] arrive to any considerable fortune or competency, by their own wit or industry, as do many of our yeomen and farmers in England."¹ Politically France seems to have been feared.

¹⁸ Wycherly quotes in French from Montaigne in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Plain Dealer*, which is itself based on *Le Misanthrope* of Molière; and speaks of the French rules. Congreve, in his *Poems*, models *The Peasant in Search of His Heifer* on a tale of "Monsieur de la Fontaine."

¹ John Evelyn, *The State of France*, Edition Upcott, p. 80. Again, (*Ibid.*) "As touching the plebeians or roturiers of France; truly I esteem them for the most miserable objects that one may likely behold upon the face of the earth; . . ."

“ . . . her later accession of Bretagne, Guyenne, Normandy (once the goodly portions of England) and Bourgogne, . . . all of them under one Prince . . . by whose favor or spleen there was always a facile entrance for any potent stranger to disturb the rest of the Kingdom.” (*Ibid.* p. 84.)

And again, “In fine, France is at present grown to that stature, so well planted and commodiously laid to itself, that (but for her own madness and feared fate of these times . . .) in the reall interest and balance with her neighbors, it were high time she were now a little observed, and a non-ultra fixed unto her proceedings and future aspirations.” (*Ibid.* p. 87.)

“Finally, they have a natural dread and hate to the English, as esteeming us, for the most part, a fierce, rude, and barbarous nation. . .” (P. 92.) It becomes evident that much of this type of criticism is inspired by an irritated patriotism.

As we took note of Sir John Evelyn's praising France as the “principal abode of a Gentleman,” so we find, by contrast, that Milton, in 1638, seems to have cared little either for France or for Paris, when he passed through, on his way to Italy. The most noteworthy event of the few days he spent in Paris seems to have been his meeting with Hugo Grotius, then minister from Sweden, through the kind offices of Lord Thomas Scudamore, ambassador from England. (*Defensio Secunda pro Populo Anglicana, contra infamum Libellum Anonymum.* vol. 5, p. 231.)

In spite of her intellectual advancement, France was considered somewhat affected in matters of learning. Says Evelyn:

“Every great person who builds there, however qualified with intellectuals, pretends to his elaboratory and library; for the furnishing of which last he does not much amuse himself in the particular elections of either

authors or impressions; but having erected his cases and measured them, accords with a stationer to furnish him with so many gilded folios, so many yards of quartos and octavos by the great, till his bibliotheke be full of volumes. And yet some of them, both have excellent books, and are very polite scholars; but the Noblesse do not naturally so addict themselves to studie as the gown-men do." (*Ibid.* pp. 81, 82.)

As to the stability of the French, Evelyn believes it to be "the manner of this nation . . . to be as soon weary of their new inventions, as children are of rattles."

Dryden suggests an anti-French prejudice to be general among English judges of French music, in connection with his praise of Monsieur Grabut, who wrote the score for *Albion and Albanus*:

" . . . amongst some English musicians and their scholars (who are sure to judge after them) the imputation of being a Frenchman, is enough to make a party who maliciously endeavor to decry him."²

In the field of poetry, as well, do we find this second current of criticism. As we have found the nobility accepting and admiring French literary conventions, so we shall see the burghers, of whom Samuel Pepys is an able representative, no less sincerely disliking them. Pepys' opinions were indeed different from those of the Court. He attended a performance of *Heraclius* on September 5, 1667, and found it "a good play"; he discovered much that he liked in a translated version of *Le menteur* (November 28, 1667), but otherwise there is no evidence of his approving any of the French poetic fashions. His comment on *Horace* is that it is "a silly tragedy." (January 19, 1668-69.) On June 23, 1663, he went

"Down to Deptford, all the way reading *Pompey the Great*, (a play translated from the French by several noble persons; among others, my Lord Buckhurst) that

² *Albion and Albanus*, Preface.

to me is but a mean play, and the words and the sense not very extraordinary."

The *Cid* fares little better:

"December 1, 1662—To the Cockpitt, with much crowding and waiting, where I saw the *Valiant Cid* acted, a play I have read with great delight, but is a most dull thing acted, which I never understood before, there being no pleasure in it."

During the summer of 1661, the French troupe of players then in London performed a *French Comedy* by an unknown author. Says Pepys in commenting upon this play:

"August 30, 1661—Then my wife and I went to Drury Lane to see the French comedy; which was so ill done, and the scenes and company and everything also so nasty and out of order and poor, that I was sick all the while in my mind to be there. . . There being nothing pleasant but the foolery of the farce, we went home."

Pepys furnishes us with but one comment on rhyme, given in connection with his estimate of Dryden's *Indian Queen*; "The play good, but spoiled with the rhyme, which breaks the sense."³

Dryden, the burgher often cropping out in spite of his care for noble patronage, says:

"I should not have troubled myself thus far with French poets, but I find our Chedreux criticks wholly form their judgments by them. But for my part, I desire to be judged by the laws of my own country; for it seems unjust to me that the French should prescribe here, till they have conquered. Our little Sonettiers who follow them, have too narrow souls to judge of poetry." (*All for Love*, Preface.)

Again, in *Marriage à la Mode*, says Doralice to Palomede:

"You are an admirer of the dull French poetry, which is so thin that it is the very gold-leaf of wit, the very

³ Helen McAfee, *Pepys on The Restoration Stage*, p. 25.

wafers and whipped cream of sense, for which a man opens his mouth and gapes, to swallow nothing; and to be an admirer of such profound dulness, one must be endowed with a great perfection of impudence and ignorance."

Such wholly divergent currents of literary creed as this attitude, contrasted with that of the Court, explain the unsettled state of the Restoration drama, the conflict between the French and English standards of rule and structure.

The chief objection to the unities is that they can do no more than raise the degree of excellence of a good production; but, that incapable of creating one, they are vastly inferior to imaginative genius.

"By their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and the integrity of the scenes, they [the French] have brought on themselves that dearth of plot, and narrowness of the imagination, which may be observed in all their plays."⁴

And again:

"As for this other argument, that by pursuing one single theme they gain an advantage to express and work up the passions, I wish any example . . . would make it good; for I confess that their verses are to me the coldest I have ever read." (*Ibid.* p. 57.)

The theory of leaving the stage at all times occupied fares no better:

"In this ridiculous manner the play goes forward, the stage being never empty all the while: so that the street, the houses, and the closet are made to walk about, and the persons stand still." (*Ibid.*, p. 64.)

Dryden very fairly attributes such divergences of dramatic convention to differences of national genius, "For the genius of the English cannot bear too regular a

⁴ Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 63.

play; we are given to a variety, even to a debauchery of pleasure." (*Don Sebastian*, Preface.)⁵

Sir Robert Howard attacks the unities upon the ground that they in no wise further the reality of a play. They forbid the portrayal of thirty-six hours' action within the two and a half hours' duration of the play itself; but, he continues, it is equally impossible to crowd the action of even five hours into the length of time it takes to act out a play, and improbability has no degrees.⁶

Let us turn to the question of rhyme viewed from a less favorable angle than the one we have already considered. The long rhymed speeches of the French classic drama are criticised as being stilted, unreal declamations, since passion seldom expresses itself in long and ordered tirades. In comedy it is thought to be equally artificial, since the greatest pleasure there lies in the swift parrying of ready wit.

"When the French stage came to be reformed by Cardinal Richelieu, those long harangues were introduced to conform with the gravity of a churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*; they are not so properly to be called plays, as long discourses of reason of state; and *Polyeucte* in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs."⁷

Dryden offers an interesting solution for these existing differences, besides the sedate influence of the great Cardinal. The French, who are naturally of an "airy and gay temper," like to make themselves serious at their plays, while the English, "more sullen," come to be diverted.

⁵ "After all, it was a bold attempt of mine, to write upon a single plot, unmix'd with comedy; which, though it be the natural and true way, yet is not to the Genius of this nation."

—Dryden, *Cleomenes*, Preface.

⁶ *The Great Favorite*, Preface. 1668.

⁷ Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 58.

Several times do we find expressions of a wearying or a dislike of rhyme. Dryden tells us, in the Prologue to *Aureng-Zebe*, that he

"... grows weary of his long-lov'd Mistress Rhyme;
 Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
 And Nature flies him like enchanted ground."

Again, he writes to Godfrey Kneller:

"... Goths and Vandals, a rude northern race,
 Did all the matchless monuments deface.
 Then all the Muses in one ruin lie,
 And rhyme began to enervate poetry."

—*Epistle to Sir Godfrey Kneller.*^a

John Milton delivers himself of a thundering denunciation of rhyme. It is

"... no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse; in longer works especially: but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre . . . it is . . . trivial and of no true musical delight, which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another; not in the jingling sound of like endings; . . . This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect; (though it may seem so, perhaps, to vulgar readers) that it rather is to be esteem'd an example

^a In this connection it is interesting to consider the comments of Shadwell and the Earl of Mulgrave.

"With what prodigious scarcity of wit
 Did the new authors starve the hungry pit?
 Infected by the French, you must have rhyme,
 Which long, to please the ladies' ears, did chime."

—Shadwell, *The Squire of Alsatia*, Prologue.

"For dances, flutes, Italian songs and rhime,
 May keep up sinking nonsense for a time.
 But that will fail which now so much o'errules,
 And sense no longer may submit to Fools."

—Earl of Mulgrave, *Essay of Poetry*.

set, (the first in English,) of antient liberty recover'd to Heroick poem, from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming."⁹

Another interesting expression of the more British side of the question is that of Edward Phillips. If the style be elegant and finished, any sort of rhymed verse is better dispensed with, for

" . . . the truth is the measure alone without any rime at all would give far more ample scope and liberty both to style and fancy than can possibly be observed in rime. . . ."¹⁰

Thomas Rymer condemns not only the French rhyme, but the language as well, as being unfit for nobler poetry.

"The *French* now onely use the long *Alexandrins*, and would make up in length what they want in strength and substance; yet they are too faint and languishing, and attain not that *numerosity* which the dignity of the Heroick verse requires, and which is ordinary in an *English* verse of *ten syllables*."

And again, "The French wants sinews for great and Heroick subjects, and even in love matters, by their own confession, is a very infant."¹¹

Lord Roscommon, too, attributed French failure in poetry to the nature of the language.

"Vain are our neighbors' hopes and vain their cares,
The fault is more their language's than theirs."
(*Essay of Translated Verse.*)

There is evident resentment of the dominance of French influences in English literature. Aphra Behn addresses Sir William Clifton as ". . . you, who in spite of all the follies we import from France so much

⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I. *The Verse*.

¹⁰ Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum*, Preface, 1675.

¹¹ Thomas Rymer, *Preface to Rapin*, cited by Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the XVIIth Century*, pp. 166, 167.

in fashion here, still retain and still maintain the good old English customs. . . ." (*Miscellany*, 1685.) And according to Shadwell:

"After this restraint upon poets, there is little scope left unless we retrieve the exploded barbarism of fool, devil, giant, or monster, or translate French farces, which, with all the wit of the English added to them, can scarce be made tolerable." (*The Humorists*, Preface, 1671.)

And finally, Sir George Etheredge, says:

" . . . I'm afraid that while to France we go,
To bring you home fine dresses, dance and show,
The stage, like you, will but more foppish grow.
Of foreign wares, why should we fetch the scum
When we can be so richly served at home?"¹²

Where harsh judgments appear in no ordered form, in no regulated plan of attack, it becomes difficult to present them in any way other than a simple tabulation of those eminently French elements that seem displeasing to English minds. Although Dryden praised the French language in comparison with English, he remarks its inability to measure up to the Italian:

" . . . and the French, who now cast longing eyes to their country, [i.e. Italy] are not less ambitious to possess their elegance in poetry and musick; in both they labour at impossibilities. 'Tis true indeed, they have reformed their tongue and brought their prose and poetry to a standard; the sweetness and the purity is much improved by throwing off the unnecessary consonants which made their spelling tedious, and their pronunciation harsh: but after all, as nothing can be improved beyond its own species or farther than its original Nature will allow, . . . so neither can the natural harshness of the French, or their perpetual ill-accent be ever refin'd

¹² Etheredge, *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter*, 1676, Prologue.

into perfect harmony like the Italian." (*Albion and Albanus*, Preface.)

French wit is likewise severely judged. Says Dryden, in the Preface to *An Evening's Love*, after having acknowledged borrowing the plot from Thomas Corneille:

"I have farther to add, that I seldom use the wit and language of any romance or play which I undertake to alter; because my own, (as bad as it is) can furnish me with nothing so dull as what is there."

As for French humor, we find that:

"though they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have small use of it in their comedies or farces; they being but ill imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which stirred up laughter in the old comedy."¹³

The French are further criticised, to continue the enumeration, for their over meticulousness and affected politeness. According to Dryden again:

"The writing of prefaces to plays was probably invented by some very ambitious poet, who never thought he had done enough. Perhaps by some ape of the French eloquence, who uses to make a business of a letter of gallantry, an examen of a farce; and, in short, a great pomp and ostentation on every trifle. This is certainly the talent of that nation, and ought not to be invaded by any other. They do that out of gaiety which would be an imposition to us.

"We may satisfy ourselves with surmounting them in

¹³ *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 74. As a final example of Dryden's feelings on French wit we have the following:

"And may those drudges of the stage whose fate
Is damned dull farce more dully to translate,
Fall under that excise the state thinks fit
To set on all French wares, whose worst is wit.
French farce, worn out at home, is sent abroad,
And, patch'd up here, is made our English mode."

—*Conquest of Granada*, Prologue.

the scene, and safely leave them those trappings of writing and flourishes of the pen, with which they adorn the borders of their plays. . . ." (*The Tempest*, or *The Enchanted Isle*, Preface.)¹⁴

As for the affected politeness, Dryden continues:

"Yet in this nicety of manners does the excellency of French poetry consist: their heroes are the most civil people breathing; but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense: all their wit is in their ceremony; and they want the genius which animates our stage; and therefore 'tis but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. But, as the civilest man in the company is commonly the dullest, so these authors, while they are afraid to make you laugh or cry out of pure good manners make you sleep. They are so careful not to exasperate a critick, that they never leave him any work . . . for no part of a poem is worth our discommending where the whole is insipid."

(*All for Love*, Preface.)

French plays are criticised for their want of strong character building.

"After all, it is to be acknowledged, that most of those comedies, which have been lately written, have been ally'd too much to farce: and this must of necessity fall out till we forbear the translation of French plays: for their poets, wanting judgment to make or maintain true characters, strive to cover their defects with ridiculous figures and grimaces." (*An Evening's Love*, Preface.)¹⁵

¹⁴ Again, "You see how little these great authors did esteem the point of honour, so much magnified by the French, and so ridiculously ap'd by us. . . . I shall never subject my characters to the French standard; where love and honour are to be weighed by drams and scruples."

—*Essay of Heroic Plays*.

¹⁵ In the Preface to *Œdipus* Dryden censures Corneille for making Theseus, and not *Œdipus* the hero of his tragedy of the same name.

Finally Dryden observes that only the very meanest of customs leave France for English use:

“ . . . for the French, I do not name them for it is the fate of our country-men to admit little of theirs among us, but the basest of their men, the extravagances of their fashion, and the frippery of their merchandise.”
(*Rival Ladies*, Epistle Dedicatory.)

In addition to these opinions regarded as an independent critical force, quite separate from any associated ideas of parallel English conventions, there exists that adverse criticism of French poetic customs which found itself in immediate connection with a comparison of similar English poetic customs. The spirit of patriotism animating these expressed comparisons causes the French to be judged far more unfavorably than they are in any expression of independent judgment. Let us compare Dryden's foregoing views on the respective merits of French and English with the following:

“Their tongue, [the ‘Gauls’] enfeebl'd, is refin'd too much,
And like pure gold, it bends at every touch:
Our sturdy Teuton yet will art obey,
More fit for manly thought, and strengthened with allay.”

—*Epistle to Mr. Mottous.*

Dryden's criticisms that deal solely with the structure or origin of French plots, are less severe than those in which he comments upon the dislike of his countrymen for “barren French plots,” or those in which he establishes a comparison between this barrenness of the French, and the copiousness and variety of the English manner.

French regularity is often judged in terms of such a comparison, and the first example we shall consider offers a peculiar admission for one attacking rule.

“First . . . we have many plays of ours as regular as any of theirs, and which, besides, have more variety

of plot and characters; and secondly . . . in most of the regular plays of Shakespeare or Fletcher, (for Ben Jonson's are for the most part regular) there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing than there is in any of the French." (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 66.)

Again:

" . . . as he has given us the most correct plays [Ben Jonson] so in the precepts he has laid down in his 'discoveries' we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us."

And finally:

"If they content themselves, as Corneille did, with some flat design, which, like an ill riddle, is found out ere it be half proposed, such plots we can make every way regular, as easily as they; but whenever they endeavor to rise to any quick turns and counterturns of plot, as some of them have attempted since Corneille's plays have been less in vogue, you see they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more speciously." (*Ibid.*, pp. 64, 65.)

On the question of barring scenes of horror from the stage, Dryden thinks:

" . . . the French have reason to hide that part of the action which would occasion too much tumult on the stage and to choose rather to have it made known by narration to the audience." This, he continues, is not feasible for the English, however, as they "will scarcely suffer combats and other objects of horror to be taken from them." (*Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.)

In conclusion he says that " . . . if we are to be blamed for showing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for discovering too little of it." (p. 62.)

John Crowne remarks that, in the translation of *An-*

dromache, “. . . there is all that there is in the French play, and something more, as may be seen in the last act, where what is only dully recited in the French play, is there represented.”¹⁶

As a conclusion to these passages on rule, let us cite a section of Dryden's *Epistle to Mr. Motteux*:

“Time, action, place are so preserv'd by thee,
That e'en Corneille might with envy see
The alliance of his triple unity.”

The characters of Racine and Shakespeare are contrasted to Racine's disadvantage.

“The present French poets are generally accus'd that wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatsoever the age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French: Racine's *Bajazet* is bred at Constantinople; but his civilities are convey'd to him by some secret passage from Versaille into the seraglio.” (Dryden, *Troilus and Cressida*, Preface.)

He offers, in contrast, a study of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* who is always in the proper rôle; when dealing with his son, he is first the father; and, while receiving his subjects, he is, before all else, the monarch.

Dryden contrasts the dramatic capabilities of the two countries to the triumph of Great Britain. He believes that “. . . our English genius, incomparably beyond the trifling of the French in all the nobler parts of verse, will justly give us the preheminance.”¹⁷

And again:

“And this our forefathers, if not we, have had in Fletcher's plays, to an much higher degree of perfection than the French poets can reasonably hope to reach . . . after all, I am of the opinion that neither our faults nor

¹⁶ John Crowne, *Andromache*, Epistle to the Reader.

¹⁷ *Albion and Albanus*, Preface.

their virtues are considerable enough to place them above us." (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 59.)¹⁸

After this general summing up of the respective dramatic potentialities of the two countries, Dryden proceeds to measure the excellence of individual plays and authors:

"Corneille himself, their arch-poet, what has he produced except *The Liar*, and you know how it was cried up in France; but when it came upon the English stage, . . . the most favorable to it would not put it in competition with many of Fletcher's or Ben Jonson's."

(*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, p. 54.)

It is the Earl of Roscommon who sums up the entire situation:

"But who did ever in French authors see
The comprehensive English energy?
The weighty bullion of one sterling line,
Drawn to French wire, would thro' whole pages shine.

For I'll recant when France can shew me wit
As strong as ours, or as succinctly writ."

—*Essay of Translated Verse.*

We have already called attention to Samuel Butler's *Satire upon our Ridiculous Imitation of the French*, and to his hostility towards the importation of French customs. There are further examples of the attitude of this eminent representative of the satire and burlesque of the period. He attacks Georges Scudéry at the end of his satire *To a Bad Poet*, and censures by ridicule the plays of the time (plays in "heroick" style, and much influenced by the French classic stage) in his *Repartees between Cat and Puss*.

¹⁸ As further example, let us consider what Dryden says in his *Epistle to the Earl of Roscommon*:

"The French pursu'd their [i.e., Italians'] steps; and
Britain last,
In manly sweetness all the rest surpass'd."

We may feel secure, then, in believing that a certain amount of the criticism unfavorable to the poetry of France was actuated by a conceivable patriotic fervor rather than an impartial weighing of values. Whether or not the same results would have been reached by such an investigation remains an open question. Differences of national genius, upon which must of necessity depend the norm of judgment, might account for such criticism, even without the conscious desire on the part of the critic to defend, or at least uphold, his own standards. But, to leave aside any speculation, one may say that the contemporary comments show that a comparative criticism is always more severe on the French than a more objective, independent one.

We have seen that the majority opinion of the leading party in Restoration England was favorable to the French poetry it judged. The adverse criticisms fall into two classes: independent judgments, which appear less representative of the taste of the times, and comparative criticisms, which are colored by a sentiment of defensive patriotism. Weighing the evidence on both sides, we may decide that, on the whole, Restoration England was favorable to French poetry, eager to receive it, and willing to accept it as its model. This partiality is clearly the result of the artificial political stimulus of the Restoration court, and, while it is the stronger of the two currents of literary criticism of the time, is not representative of the true feeling of the British people.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLIEST JOURNALS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

WITH the death of Charles II the dominance of the Court party and the authority of its tastes in matters literary diminished to a marked degree. There came into being a literary public which took its standing from the value of its judgments rather than from any social or political rank. Authorship grew less precarious. Favor and influence sought those who were able to wield a trenchant pen, and nobles and people alike valued and sometimes feared their views. In proportion as diletantism waned, literature established itself as a career. Richard Steele fared better than Samuel Butler. After 1695 the press of England became free, and journals conveyed to the many what had formerly been offered by individual authors to the lettered few. The amazing rapidity with which these journals and "couriers" came into being attests the growth of the reading public, and the literary worth of some of the most popular ones bears witness to the state of development of this group.

In addition, then, to the criticism with which we have been occupied, we shall have to consider the judgments of this increasing reading public, as it is represented through the journals of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Before, however, studying the detailed criticisms on French poetry uttered at this time, we may note several important changes in attitude. There is less formal criticism devoted to the poetry of France. We find no consideration of French poetic conventions as minute and thorough-going as was that accorded them

by Dryden, for example, through the person of *Lisideius*. The criticisms which we do find, are fragmentary, and, for the most part, given almost as asides in connection with some other matter; usually, as before noted, in comparison with some parallel British institution. Another point of difference is directly dependent upon literary conditions as they developed in France; criticisms gradually cease to be contemporary with the work criticised. The period of the Restoration showed us several instances where plays were produced in Dublin and in London within a very few months of their appearance in Paris. With the end of classic production, however, France put forth but little poetry, and still less of actual merit; with the result that critics of poetry were forced to content themselves with the material already at hand.

The general attitude of the early journals towards France itself is by no means unfavorable. Addison hails France among the "politest nations of Europe"¹ and praises the King of that country for continuing its fine traditions in printing. Several letters addressed to the *Guardian* by English travellers in France laud the beauty of the public buildings, and speak kindly of the people, who are so "talkative and courteous"² that a stranger is quite ashamed not to learn their language. Another letter to the same paper presents a comparison between the French and the English, where France fares well. ". . . if the French do not excel the English in all the arts of humanity, they do at least in the outward expressions of it. And upon this, as well as other accounts, though I believe the English are a much wiser nation, the French are undoubtedly much more happy."³ The *Tatler*⁴ pays a tribute to French art in praising Lebrun's

¹ *The Spectator*, No. 367, Thursday, May 1, 1712.

² *The Guardian*, No. 104, Friday, July 10, 1713.

³ *Guardian*, No. 101, Tuesday, July 7, 1713.

⁴ *Tatler*, No. 8, April 26, 1709.

picture of the Battle of Porus, and its excellent reproduction of the very spirit of the scene.

In the matter of politics the English are, quite naturally, British first, but remain fair withal in their judgments of the French. The *Guardian*⁵ in a series of issues presents unprejudiced accounts of Madame de Maintenon and of Colbert's advice to the King. Aside from one poem against Louis and his not accepting British peace terms,⁶ the *Tatler*, too, is just and fair in its view of France, and states political news as fact, without comment or hatred. The *Examiner*, no doubt the most Tory of all the papers under consideration, presents an openness of mind that is remarkable for contemporary criticism, even, perhaps, considering the fact that the Tory ministers were striving to secure peace with France. We find there stated that "The people of England have a natural aversion to the French"⁷ . . . and again:

"This nation has been so long engaged in war with the French that some of our unthinking Britons have contracted a kind of personal malice against them; never considering that if our country be ruined, it is perfectly indifferent to us whether it be done by the French, the Dutch, the German, the Turk, the Devil, or the Pope." (*Ibid.*, No. 37, Thursday, August 14, 1712.)

Again, issue Fourteen of this journal (March 6, 1711) refers to the Dauphin as ". . . likely to succeed in a few years to the greatest kingdom in Europe," and issue Thirty-nine (August 28, 1712) states that the French have ever been honorable enemies, having offered an advantageous peace, and never having prevaricated nor falsified. The *Spectator* refers to the suppression of of duelling as ". . . deservedly one of the most glorious

⁵ Nos. 46, 47, 48, May 4, 5, 6, 1713; No. 50, May 11, 1713.

⁶ *Tatler*, No. 24, June 3, 1709.

⁷ *Examiner*, No. 3, Thursday, August 17, 1711.

parts of the present king's reign,"⁸ and praises Richelieu both as statesman and as literary patron.

"Cardinal Richelieu's politics made France the terror of Europe. The statesmen who have appeared in that nation of late years, have, on the contrary, rendered it either the pity or the contempt of its neighbors. The Cardinal erected that famous academy which has carried all the parts of polite learning to the greatest height." (No. 305, February, 1711-12.)

The customs of France greatly influenced those of England in matters of fashion and habit as well as of literature. France was the "fountain of dress," English ladies designing their toilettes after those of the model puppets or dolls that came dressed from Paris. The very existence of this leadership must serve as the most valuable criticism in its favor, since expressed opinion seems rather to resent it.

". . . I could heartily wish that there were an act of Parliament for prohibiting the importation of French fopperies" says the *Spectator*, for English women receive "very strong impressions from that ludicrous nation." (*Ibid.*, No. 45, April 21, 1711.)

The decrease in French fashions is regarded as one of the beneficial results of the war.

In a later issue, (*Ibid.*, No. 104, June 29, 1711) Hughes comments on women who wear a habit with breeches for riding. "The model for this Amazonian hunting habit for ladies, was, I take it, first imported from France, and well enough expresses the gaiety of a people who are taught to do anything, so it be with assurance." French dancing, however, is admired in Budgell's appreciation of a dancing teacher's entertainment.⁹

". . . I was very much pleased and surprised with that part of his entertainment which he called French danc-

⁸ *Spectator*, No. 99, Saturday, June 23, 1711.

⁹ *Spectator*, No. 67, May 17, 1711.

ing. There were several young men and women, whose limbs seemed to have no other motion but purely what the music gave them."

French manners and customs fare badly indeed at the hands of these early-journal critics. To begin with the French tongue itself, "the copiousness of that tittle-tattle language"¹⁰ derives its nature from the over-garrulousness of those who speak it. "It is certain that the light talkative humour of the French has not a little infected their tongue, which might be shown by many instances."¹¹ We find several references to the French inclination to talkativeness, not least among them the *Tatler's* account of the frozen speeches, from Sir John Mandeville's expedition into the territories of Nova Zembla. ". . . We went to the French cabin, who, to make amends for their three weeks' silence, were talking and disputing with greater rapidity and confusion than I ever heard in an assembly, even of that nation." (No. 254, November, 1710.) A general summing up of the traits ascribed to the French by these early-journal commentators reveal their vanity, the freedom of their conversation, the "fantastical" conduct of their women, and the levity of their behaviour. Influences such as these are resumed in the *Spectator's* review of the unhappy circumstances attending the training of "Lewis of France":

"Ostentation of riches, the vanity of equipages, shame of poverty, and ignorance of modesty were the common arts of life: the generous love of one woman was changed into gallantry for all the sex, and friendships among men turned into commerces of interest, or mere professions, while these were the rules of life, perjuries in the prince, and a general corruption of manners in the sub-

¹⁰ *Freethinker*, No. 150, August 28, 1719.

¹¹ *Spectator*, No. 135, August 4, 1711.

ject were snares in which France has entangled all her neighbors." (No. 139, August, 1711.)

Such influences on English custom are regretted.

" . . . I would . . . reduce these airy exorbitancies of custom . . . not by running too much upon the airy phantastick custom of the French, and devoting our whole time to our passions, impede the nobler designs of life." ¹²

And finally: " . . . France has infected all the nations of Europe with its levity . . . as liveliness and assurance . . . are the qualifications of the French nation, the same habits and customs will not give offense to that people which they produce amongst those of our country. Modesty is our distinguishing character, as vivacity is theirs." ¹³

Another source of regret is the influx of Huguenots who, no doubt, caused these traits to become still more firmly rooted in British soil. Mist asks, for example, "Are we not overrun with French valets de chambres, perriwig makers, taylors, cooks, . . . perfumers . . . who came here to starve an abundance of English families?" (*Miscellany Letters*, No. 53.) ¹⁴ The Britons are exhorted to quit these pernicious habits for the simpler customs of their own stock, as they existed . . . "before the British gallantry lost its genuine lustre and innocence in the dissolute manners of a neighboring nation, which (some years past) succeeded in corrupting the pleasures and politics of Europe." ¹⁴ The same paper remarks, on another occasion, that " . . . I wish I could persuade them to restore the plain, honest good breeding of their fore-fathers, and to value the manly frankness of a true Briton, before the slavish politeness

¹² Nathaniel Mist, *Miscellany Letters*, No. 101.

¹³ *Spectator*, No. 435, July, 1712.

¹⁴ *Freethinker*, No. 78, December 19, 1718.

of a Frenchman.”¹⁵ France itself, however, continued to find favor with the nobles, who completed their education by a visit there, regarding Paris quite as Evelyn did, as the most desirable place for a Cavalier’s training. The *Freethinker* alone admires the French philosophical turn of mind and lauds for their independent thought, the brave spirits of France “ . . . [who] now strive to vindicate their liberty in religious matters.”¹⁶

While it is important to see the way in which France was regarded from all points of view by the critics we are considering, it is of far more interest to us to study the literary influences by themselves.

Mist’s Letters still speak of a “modish French education.”¹⁷ Of thirty-three books mentioned by the *Spectator* as forming a lady’s library, seven are French,¹⁸ and a catalogue proposed by the same paper for a lady’s reading, contains the *Secret Treaties and Negotiations of the Marshal d’Estrades*, Bayle’s *Dictionary* (on the advice of Jacob Tonson), *Pharamond*, and *Cassandra* of Calprenède.¹⁹ Finally, Sappho and Anacreon were known through French translation as well as English. The education of French women is on the whole much admired. Says the *Freethinker*:

“It was likewise very fashionable among the French ladies, till of late, to apply themselves to knowledge; and several treatises of philosophy were written, for their instruction, in their native language. And shall our females, who have copied most of the French levities to admiration, not attempt to rival their neighbors in one excellency?” (No. 147, August 17, 1719.)

¹⁵ No. 24, June 13, 1718.

¹⁶ *Freethinker*, No. 56, October 3, 1718.

¹⁷ *Miscellany Letters*, No. 89.

¹⁸ These seven are *Astrea*, *The Cyrus*, *The Five Comforts of Matrimony*, *Father Malebranche’s Search after Truth*, *Clelia*, *Cassandra*, and *Cleopatra*. *Spectator*, No. 37, April 12, 1711.

¹⁹ No. 92, August 17, 1719.

The journals under consideration contain references in abundance to French authors and philosophers, both contemporary and older. These writers are mentioned either without comment, or are cited with praise. Some of the criticisms are extremely favorable; none are derogatory. The *Tatler* says, for instance, that he will make use of the "late act of naturalization to introduce what I shall think fit from France. The use of this law may, I hope, be extended to people the polite world with new characters, as well as the kingdom itself with new subjects. Therefore, an author of that nation, called La Bruyère, I shall make bold with on such occasions." (No. 9, April 28, 1709.)

Again, the same paper describes La Bruyère's *Satire on the French* as "one of the most elegant pieces of raillery and satire which I have ever read."²⁰ There are, in this way, references that indicate a friendly acquaintance with Montaigne, Rabelais, Scaliger, the Port-Royalists, Voiture, Descartes, Malebranche, Fénelon, Pascal, Bouhours, Rapin, Bossu, the two Daciers, de la Motte, Fontenelle, and Boileau. It will be noted that these are for the most part writers of prose, and, at the most, of criticisms on poetry. We have evidence that French criticisms on the dogmas of poetry were well received. The *Spectator* thinks that the fable of an epic poem should be filled with "the probable and the marvellous . . . as the French critics choose to phrase it."²¹ The *Guardian* favors French regularity for the greater orders of poetry.

" . . . some famous French critics, who have written upon the epic poem, the drama, and the great kinds of poetry, which cannot subsist without great regularity; but [it] ought by no means to be required in odes,

²⁰ No. 57, August 19, 1709.

²¹ No. 315, March 1, 1711-12.

panegyrics, and the like, which naturally admit of great liberties." (No. 12, March 25, 1713.)²²

There is a tendency, however, as we have seen in the earlier English-French comparisons, to abuse the French for the very reason of this critical leadership.

"A few general rules extracted out of the French authors with a certain cant of words has sometimes set up an illiterate, heavy writer for a most judicious and formidable critic."²³

And finally, says the *Tatler*: ". . . I could never read any of our modish French authors or those of our own country, who are the imitators and admirers of that trifling nation, without being for some time out of humour with myself, and at everything about me." (No. 108, December 16, 1709.)

Daniel Defoe often refers to French learning, and expresses the thought that England might do well to pattern herself upon the French model in this particular. It is an interesting fact, further, that in Part Two of *Robinson Crusoe*, by this ultra-Protestant English dissenter—even a more striking figure to be voicing opinions not unfriendly to France than Dean Swift, a church of England clergyman—the most sympathetically drawn character is a French priest. The following quotation, although it deals primarily with learning, and translated works of a scholarly order, shows the high place in which so stock-British a thinker held French culture:

"In this very thing the King of *France* outdoes all the Princes of Europe, where such encouragement is given to learning, that all useful books in the world now

²² Further we find that "Milton has . . . filled a great part of his poem with that kind of writing which the French critics call the *tendré* [sic] and which is in a particular manner engaging to all sorts of readers." *Spectator*, No. 357, April 19, 1712.

²³ *Spectator*, No. 291, February 2, 1711-12.

·speak French, and a Man may be an universal Schollar, read Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, and all the antient poets; Cicero, Plato, Epictetus, Aristotle, and all the antient Philosophers; St. Athanasius, St. Augustine and all the primitive Fathers; Plutarch, Livy, and all the antient Historians, and yet neither understand a word of Greek or Latin, and pray, let us examine if the press has been restrained to the absolute Power of a Licenser or Reviser, on the contrary, all the liberty and encouragement imaginable has been given to the Press, all the Abbies and publick Libraries in the kingdom are oblig'd to take one, and when any author has publish'd an extraordinary piece, the King himself has thought fit to reward him with a Magnificence, peculiar to the pride and state of the French court. But this liberty has been the life of learning, and ever since Cardinal Richelieu erected the Royal Academy, no nation in the world ever flourished in learning like them." (*An Essay on the Regulation of the Press*. Anonymous. London, 1704, p. 9.)

As a final step in the preparation of the early journal criticism of French poetry let us consider the views expressed on Boileau, poet, critic, and law-giver of the standards of classic poetry in France. Gaston Paris considers criticisms of him less an estimate of an individual author's achievement, than an appreciation of French taste and influence in general, asserting itself through one of its most characteristic representatives.²⁴ While, as we shall see, an estimate of Boileau is by no means synonymous with a survey of the criticisms uttered on French poetry, yet it is helpful to study them together, the more limited study of Boileau aiding as an

²⁴ "L'idée que les étrangers ont eue de Boileau et qu'ils ont traduite chacun à sa manière, selon son génie, et selon les besoins intellectuelles de son pays, ils l'ont prise d'abord dans l'opinion que les compatriotes du poète avaient de lui. Ce n'étaient pas les doctrines de Boileau, c'était le goût français qu'on cherchait dans l'*Art Poétique*." Gaston Paris, *Boileau*, Paris, 1892.

index of the attitude in which the larger subject was regarded.

As a critic Boileau is ranked with the foremost of the classic school. We find several statements such as the following: "Juvenal, Monsieur Boileau, and all the greatest writers in almost every age."²⁵ "Horace, Juvenal, Boileau, and indeed the greatest writers in almost every age . . ."²⁶ Again, "I have a great esteem for a true critic such as Aristotle and Longinus among the Greeks; Horace and Quintilian among the Romans; Boileau and Dacier among the French."²⁷ And finally, ". . . by the examples of Horace, Juvenal, and Boileau, and the best writers of every age, . . . the follies of the stage and the Court had never been accounted too sacred for ridicule."²⁸

When spoken of in connection with contemporary writers, Boileau maintains an equally high place. "Among the little that I have read of the French poetry," says Nicholas Rowe, "Monsieur Boileau seems to me without comparison to have had the finest and truest taste of the best authors of antiquity."²⁹ And again, ". . . I shall put my reader in mind of Boileau, the most correct poet among the moderns; not to mention la Fontaine, who by this way of writing is become more into vogue than any other author of our times."³⁰

Arbiter of poetic dogma, Boileau is frequently cited as authority in the formulation of some English critic's view. Addison agrees with him that Virgil excels Tasso,³¹

²⁵ *Mist*, *Letters*, vol. II., Letter 66.

²⁶ *Guardian*, No. 137, August 18, 1713.

²⁷ *Spectator*, No. 592, September 10, 1714.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 34, April 9, 1711.

²⁹ N. Rowe, *Some Account of Boileau's Writings; Boileau in English*. London, 1712, E. Sanger.

³⁰ *Spectator*, No. 183, September 29, 1711.

³¹ *Spectator*, No. 5, March 6, 1710.

and uses the authority of the *Lutrin*³² as well as that of the *Aeneid* for his defense of Milton's shadowy and improbable characters (such as Sin and Death) in *Paradise Lost*. Upon other occasions, the Spectator admires the principles laid down by Boileau and Bouhours, that nothing can be beautiful that is not just, and that truth and good sense must be the groundwork of any piece of literature that is to endure. The same paper remarks, on the question of "mixed wit," that "Monsieur Boileau . . . has everywhere rejected it with scorn . . ."³³

A quotation from the *Art Poétique* is used as motto for a *Lover's Letter* in the *Freethinker*,³⁴ and the *Tatler* quotes Boileau's portrait of a pedant as an example of excellent description.³⁵

We have found but two adverse criticisms of Boileau, one commenting on his lack of passion in his translation of Sappho,³⁶ the other censuring his satires for their scathing criticisms of mankind in general.³⁷

Having thus prepared ourselves by a study of the attitude of the period towards France, French literary and critical influences in general, and towards the law-giver of French poetic usages in particular, we are ready to

³² *Ibid.*, No. 273, January 12, 1711-12.

³³ *Spectator*, No. 62.

³⁴ "Telle qu'une bergère . . .

Doit éclater sans pompe une élégante Idylle."

—No. 78, December 19, 1719.

³⁵ "A pedant is wonderfully well described in six lines of Boileau" which he gives in French:

"Un pedant enyvrré de sa vaine science
Tout herissé de Grec, tout bouffu d'arrogance
Et qui de mille auteurs retenus mot par mot
Dans sa tête entassés n'a souvent fait qu'un sot,
Croît qu'un livre fait tout, et que sans Aristote,
La raison ne voit goutte, et le bon sens radote."

—No. 158, April 12, 1710.

³⁶ *Spectator*, 229, November 22, 1711.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 209, October 30, 1711.

proceed to a consideration of the early journal criticisms of French poetry itself.

* * *

We have called attention to the fact that French poetry no longer calls forth the thorough-going criticism that it received during the reign of Charles II, when the French tendencies of the Court effected its decided popularity. From the more limited references to it, however, we can perceive the general attitude of the times towards French poetry, as it was expressed in the early journals.

Although the poetry of France, along with other French manifestations, had ceased to enjoy its former favor, it still occupied a position that was hardly unfavorable. In commenting upon the adequacy of French as a poetic medium, the *Freethinker* believes that "The French tongue is as soft, as numerous, as musical as the Greek; and far more natural; it is more regular than the Latin, and has neither its dryness nor affectation."¹ The *Guardian* praises the excellence of French songs. "To do justice to the French, there is no living language that abounds so much in good songs,"² both their genius and their tongue being admirably adapted to song writing. English songs in comparison with theirs are crowded with too much material. The *Spectator*, too, has a word of praise for the native French song. "I might likewise refer my reader to Molière's thoughts on this subject, as he expressed them in the character of the *Misanthrope*; but only those who are endowed with a true greatness of soul and genius can divest themselves of the little images of ridicule and admire nature in her simplicity and nakedness."³

We find unmistakable recognition of the influence

¹ No. 18, May 23, 1718.

² No. 16, March 30, 1713.

³ No. 85, June 7, 1711.

We find further comment on French music. The same journal speaks of "... a noble hymn in French, which Monsieur Bayle

which which the stage of France had exerted upon that of England. According to John Dennis, in one of his tirades against Richard Steele, "The Romans had very few plays that were worth one farthing but what they borrowed from the Grecians, as you and your deputy Governor [Colley Cibber] borrow from the French."⁴ He mentions *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, *Le menteur*, *Le Cid*, and *Tartuffe* as having been successfully turned into English, and continues: "You and your deputy Governor will go on to borrow from the French, and continue to rail at them." A letter to the *Tatler* speaks of French dancers' and harlequins' having been at one time more popular on the London stage than the English actors themselves.⁵ And again, "The diversion of one of our stages ran so low last season, that the company was forced to call in to their assistance a troop of French strollers."⁶

French rules are commented upon, though in nothing like the manner in which Lisiideius undertook to defend them. Addison recommends to his countrymen "The example of the French stage, where the kings and queens always appear unattended, and leave their guards behind the the scene. I should likewise be glad if we imitated the French in banishing from our stage the noise of drums, trumpets, and huzzas . . ."⁷

Before considering further evidence from the works has celebrated for a very fine one, and which the famous author of the *Art of Speaking* calls an admirable one. . . ."

—No. 513, October 18, 1712.

Upon another occasion there is praise of Lully for adapting the advantageous points of Italian music to the genius of the French, instead of imposing Italian music upon them.—No. 29.

⁴ *The Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar*.

⁵ *The Tatler*, No. 193, July 10, 1710.

⁶ *The Anti-Theatre*, No. 15, April 4, 1720.

⁷ *The Spectator*, No. 42, April 18, 1711.

On Addison, cf. Beljame, pp. 314, 315.

"A tout ce clinquant de mauvais aloi, il oppose les beautés plus solides du théâtre grec et de notre théâtre français qu'il

of John Dennis, we must remember that he was far more concerned with launching tirades against Richard Steele, than he was with actually upholding French tragedy, solely because of its merits. Thus, while Dennis' views are very worth studying, they are quite as much based upon personal prejudice as are the English-French comparisons to which we have already called attention. To return to his opinions, then :

"You say that in France they are delighted either with 'low and fantastical farces, or tedious and declamatory tragedies.' How rarely this sounds from anyone now, who has himself brought their plays upon the English stage. . . . It is true, one of their own celebrated authors has accused Corneille of being sometimes a little declamatory; but neither he nor anyone before yourself has ever accused Racine of it. . . . I am very willing to allow that we have had tragic poets in England who have had more genius than the French. But it is not enough to have Genius: a man must have art too, which few of our tragic poets have had."^s

In another passage Dennis defends the use of the three unities and cites Roscommon as his authority. "*Heroic Love* and *The Orphan*," he continues, "are certainly two of our best tragedies; and they are certainly two of the most regular. *The Fox*, *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman* of Ben Jonson are incomparably the best of our comedies; and they are certainly the most regular of them all."

In commenting upon Richelieu, Dennis thus characterizes the French stage as it resulted from his influence: ". . . the stage began to revive with fresh beauty. The greatest wits and most excellent artists of the age were set to work on it; all obscenity and profaneness were devait lui-meme imiter, le jour où il voulut être poète tragique dans son *Caton*."

^s *The Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar.*

banished and thus its inward and outward excellence rose together.”⁹

As a negative example of the *Spectator's* approval of the French doctrines that kept comedy and tragedy apart, we find a censure of the English custom:

“The tragi-comedy, which is the product of the English theatre, is one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet’s thoughts. An author might as well think of weaving the adventures of Aeneas and Hudibras into one poem, as of writing such a motley piece of joy and sorrow. But the absurdity of these performances is so very visible, that I shall not insist upon it.”¹⁰

It is chiefly John Dennis who defends the French stage against the charges of immorality made against it by Richard Steele. Says Dennis, “It is odd, that Sir John should never complain of the stage’s obscenity, till the French appeared among us; as if our own actors were to be indulged in a little innocent lewdness.”¹¹ He continues, in the same paper:

⁹ *The Anti-Theatre*, No. 3, February 22, 1719-20.

¹⁰ No. 40, April 16, 1711.

The same journal defends the light, even foolish epilogues to serious pieces, on the weight of French authority. “. . . every one knows that nation [i.e. the French] who are esteemed to have as polite a taste as any in Europe, always close their tragic entertainments with what they call a ‘petite pièce,’ which is purposely designed to raise mirth, and send the audience away well pleased.”—No. 341, April 1, 1712.

¹¹ *The Anti-Theatre*, No. 9, March 14, 1719-20.

There is comment on the type of British entertainment that the above mentioned French companies supplanted. Says the *Tatler*, “It will be said that these are the entertainments [cock-fighting and the like] of the common people. It is true; but they are the entertainments of no other common people.” (No. 134, February 15, 1709.)

And *Mist's Letters* speak of “. . . the barbarous sport of bull-baiting, (too much in vogue here, even among the tender sex) which may possibly inspire men with a sort of brutish courage, and render them sturdy and untractable.” (Letter No. 30.)

"I strongly suspect that he is angry with the absurdity of the French farce, as with the freedom of their language and action, without considering that our audiences are never so well pleased as when entertained with their extravagances."

A letter from Sir Andrew Artlove to Sir John Edgar ¹² states: ". . . I shall only en passant observe that all he says against the French stage is either foolish, impertinent to his purpose, or utterly false."

As regularity of form has thus far been considered the salient trait of the French drama, both by those attacking its rigidity, and by those defending its polish, it becomes indeed interesting to consider a group of criticisms that praise the content of the French classics, dwelling upon their animating spirit and inherent simplicity.

Says the *Spectator*, ¹³ "I must observe that our English poets have succeeded much better in the style than in the sentiments of their tragedies, and indeed, in those of Corneille and Racine, though the expressions are very great, it is the thought that bears them up, and swells them. For my own part, I prefer a noble sentiment that is depressed with homely language, infinitely before a vulgar one that is blown up with all the energy and sound of expression."

Again, according to the *Guardian*, "the perfect sublime" rises from a combination of the thought contained, the words used, and the harmony of the phrases. "He [i.e., Boileau] produced an instance of this perfect sublime in four verses from the *Athaliah* of Monsieur Racine."¹⁴ In a letter to Mist, there is another reference

¹² February 27, 1719-20.

¹³ No. 39, April 14, 1711.

¹⁴ No. 117, July 25, 1713. The verses in question are the following:

"Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots,
Sçait aussi des mechants arrêter les complots.
Soumis avec respect à sa volonté sainte,
Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte."

to the passage in question.¹⁵ "Reading the tragedy of *Athaliah* by Racine, I was charmed with the beauty, so natural to that author." He then ventures a translation of these lines, "without pretending to rise to the graces of the original."¹⁶

Finally, the *Spectator* praises Molière for his "inherent simplicity of thought." (No. 70, May 21, 1711.)

Thus we see that while there is still much comment that is favorable to the poetry of France, it is largely a matter of preference as such, without overmuch weighing or judging of elements, in a critical manner. There are but few penetrating discussions on dramatic conventions, and none on character building or the use of rhyme. What statements we find on French poetry, are expressed more as personal opinions, rather than criticisms that find their origin in any norm of impartial judgment.

In the criticisms that are unfavorable to French poetry we are again able to distinguish the two tendencies of independent criticism, and the comparative judgments that contrast parallel English and French institutions. The result, too, is quite the same as the one we noted in the foregoing section; comparative criticisms judge the French more severely. In the early journal comments that we are considering, the proportion of this comparative criticism over the independent is greater than it was in the period we have left, with the result that the entire body of unfavorable criticism seems greater than it did in this preceding study.

Considering the independent criticisms first, we find

¹⁵ No. 64, and signed *F. I.*

¹⁶ As further example of the high regard in which Racine was held, Mist describes an imaginary assignment of places in Hades to contemporary Letterati, where "certain insipids" receive a less severe sentence because of "... our excellent translations of the *Andromache* of Racine, Strada's *Nightingale*, and Sappho's *Odes*. (Letter 83.)

two references to poetry that is not dramatic. The *Guardian* comments on Pastorals:¹⁷

"The French are so far from thinking abstrusely, that they often seem not to think at all. It is all a run of numbers, common-place descriptions of woods, floods, groves, loves, etc. Those who write the most accurately fall into the manner of their country; which is Gallantry. I cannot better illustrate what I would say of the French, than by the dress in which they make their shepherds appear in their pastoral interludes upon the stage."

The *Spectator* refers to that type of gallant poetry called the "bouts rimés," where the rhyme words are given and the sense of the poem must be built up to suit them. He comments on it by saying:

"I do not know any greater instance of the decay of wit and learning among the French, which generally follows the declension of Empire, than the endeavoring to restore this foolish kind of wit. . . . The first occasion of these bouts-rimés made them in some manner excusable, as they were tasks which the French ladies used to impose on their lovers; but when a grave author [i.e., Ménége] . . . tasked himself, could there be anything more ridiculous?"¹⁸

The balance of the opinion expressed has to do with dramatic poetry. To such a degree is this true that John Dennis, in stating that the French genius in general has neither the force nor the sublimity of the English, speaks immediately of the dramatic manifestation of this genius, through the rules of the theatre, with no indication of its

¹⁷ No. 28, April 13, 1713.

¹⁸ Further, he gives the example of constructing a poem to fit the following rhyme words:

.....lauriers
guerriers
Musette
Lisette

Ibid., No. 60, May 9, 1711.

being but a limited example of his original statement. He asks “. . . whether the rules are not props and supports to the weakness of the French genius?”¹⁹ Sir Richard Steele, director in chief of the Drury Lane theatre which suffered an epoch of unpopularity when some French players came to London as competition, is uncompromisingly anti-French in his views. He censures the regularity animating their plays, and the principle of keeping comedy and tragedy apart.

“In France they are delighted either with low and fantastical farces, or tedious, declamatory tragedies. Their best plays are chiefly recommended by a rigid affection of regularity, within which the genius is cramped and fettered, so as to waste all its force in struggling to perform a work not to be gracefully executed under that restraint; they fall into the absurdity of thinking it more masterly to do little or nothing in a short time, than to invade the rules of time and place, to adorn their plays with greatness or variety: thus they are finical, and mechanic, when they would highly please; and when they labour for admiration, they have it for performing what they might have better deserved, if they had neglected.”²⁰

Clearly, it is the French regularity that is the chief contention between the French and English poetic schools. The *Spectator*, too, speaks of it:²¹

“Murders and executions are always transacted behind the scenes in the French theatre; which in general is very agreeable to the manners of a polite and civilized people; but as there are no exceptions to this rule on the French stage, it leads them into absurdities. . . .”

Steele reveals an interesting attitude in regard to the

¹⁹ *Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar*.

²⁰ *The Theatre*, No. 2, January 5, 1719-20. This is the attack that Dennis answers in his defence of the French.

²¹ No. 44, April 20, 1711.

theatre, believing it to be “. . . a pleasure more particularly adapted to the British genius; and the excellence of our writers in this kind shews that we are formed for it above any other people.”²² In the first issue of this paper (Jan. 2, 1719-20) he says “. . . I prefer the present British stage to any other now in Europe.”

This, then, forms the independent criticism of French poetry which we have found in these early journals. It is fragmentary and insufficient to warrant the drawing of any conclusions, except as to the attitude of individuals; and it treats, even in this manner, only a few of the questions calling for discussion in regard to French poetry. The important subject of the rhyme is almost untouched.²³

The criticisms based upon a comparative treatment of the subject, offer us more material, though we must regard much of it as the result of a certain patriotic ardor rather than that of unbiassed, scholarly analysis. To begin with the spirit animating the examples of literary art, the Briton stands for the primitive expression of feeling, rather than for the corrective influence that “polishes and repolishes.” Says the *Spectator*, “There appears something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural geniuses that is infinitely more beautiful than all turn and polish of what the French call a ‘bel

²² *The Theatre*, No. 2, January 5, 1719-20.

²³ Addison objects to rhyme in English, but on another occasion speaks of its effectiveness. “I am therefore very much offended when I see a play in rhyme; which is as absurd in English, as a tragedy of hexameters would have been in Greek or Latin.” These are Addison’s views as expressed in the Thirty-ninth issue of his journal, appearing on April 14, 1711. Less than a year later (No. 285, Jan. 26, 1711-12) we find the following: “Rhyme, without any other assistance, throws the language off from prose, and very often makes an indifferent phrase pass unregarded; but where the verse is not built upon rhymes, there pomp of sound and energy of expression are indispensably necessary to support the style, and keep it from falling into the flatness of prose.”

esprit,' by which they would express a genius refined by conversation, reflection, and the reading of the most polite authors." ²⁴

Steele's displeasure at the newly arrived French troupes of actors results quite naturally in an utter condemnation on his part of their methods of procedure. According to him:

"The French players have appeared on our stage to a crowded house of gentlemen and ladies: . . . Our play-house is put under the greatest discouragement that can possibly be, to encourage the facetious lewdness of a company of French strolling mountebanks." ²⁵

Then follows a tirade against the indecency of this French troupe. Mist, too, expresses himself on these players:

"... it was formerly thought a scandal to import French fashions; but now our nation is famous throughout the world for wit and sense, as well as for polite solid learning, what will be said of us, if we prefer the French plays and actors to our own?" ²⁶

"It is well known," he continues, "that the French theatre never produced one good tragedy well performed: . . . but we presume that no man of judgment will now compare either the French plays or actors with our own." The *Spectator* takes exception to the humour to be found in the plays of France, saying that:

"I remember the last opera I saw in that merry nation . . . Pluto, to make the more tempting figure, puts himself in a French equipage, and brings Ascalaphus along with him as his valet de chambre. This is what we call folly and impertinence; but what the French look upon as gay and polite." ²⁷

²⁴ No. 160, September 3, 1711.

²⁵ *The Theatre*, No. 21, March 12, 1719-20.

²⁶ *Miscellany Letters*, No. 1.

²⁷ No. 29, April 3, 1711.

We have found further scattered examples of this spirit of

The criticisms that compare French and English institutions are in some degree better ordered and a great deal more vehement than were the views independently expressed; but no more convincing, perhaps, when we take into consideration that they are actuated by a sentiment of patriotism and not by one of criticism. Altogether, the unfavorable criticism of French poetry found in these early journals is valuable as an index of the feeling of the times towards this poetry expressed through individual preferences. It is of but little value as an element of criticism, for it neither condemns any one element in the poetry of France, nor does it suggest many ameliorations. We may do well to look upon it as personal opinions expressed on French poetry, rather than a formal criticism of it.

Concluding our study of the early journal comment on French poetry, let us note, first, that the subject itself no longer calls forth the interest that it once did; and secondly, that the type of criticism has changed. There is far less analysis and discussion of the elements that combine to make the poetry of France the force that it is; but, on the other hand, there is more expression of personal like or dislike, occasionally of obligation, without much reason or analysis. Orders of poetry other than the dramatic are at least touched upon even though it be but twice. On the whole, the favorable and derogatory criticisms seem fairly well balanced during this period, with the scale leaning a bit, perhaps, toward the

rivalry in Cibber's Dedication to Richard Steele, of *Ximena, or the Heroic Daughter*, (*Mist's Journal*, Oct. 31, 1719).

"Thus Colley Cibber greets his partner Steele,
See here, Sir Knight, how I've outdone Corneille."

And again, in an apparent crusade against the influx of foreign words, the *Spectator* wishes that there were a law "... in particular, to prohibit any French phrases from becoming current in this kingdom. . . ." (No. 165, September 8, 1711.)

side of the laudatory opinions. The strong French tendencies of the Restoration court could scarcely be altogether obliterated in so short a time. Yet certainly, the balance of public opinion no longer swings as markedly in favor of the French as it did during the reign of Charles; and the ever-increasing British reading public bids fair to bring with it an ever-growing taste for British material. This period is the most eminently British in character of the three we shall consider in this study. The first period brought the political stimulus of the Restoration; the one that we shall treat next, presents the intellectual stimulus of the Classic movement, which we shall find to be equally foreign to the true British temper. The years at the beginning of the eighteenth century, then, represent the British genius least influenced by artificial pressure, although they of necessity look back upon the one current, and anticipate the other. In the words of the *Spectator*, "The English are the proudest nation under the sun,"²⁸ and are quite unwilling to admit the good in others; and again, "In our country a man seldom sets up for a poet, without attacking the reputation of all his brothers in the art."²⁹ The criticisms we have found are scattered, without much order or critical weight, and useful only to indicate the general attitude of the times.

²⁸ No. 432, July 16, 1712.

²⁹ No. 253, December 20, 1711.

CHAPTER III

THE ENGLISH CLASSICISTS

ALTHOUGH the early journals of the eighteenth century afford us an interesting view of the more popular side of the question we are studying, it is to be remembered that these journals, dealing as they did with politics, topics of current interest and social reform, could not treat with adequate detail any subject of a primarily literary nature. The more technical side of our question must therefore be sought in the specialized essays and discussions devoted to literary matters by writers, considered first as men of letters, and viewed quite apart from any rôle of politician or reformer.

The attitude of these authors towards France in general may be kept in mind as a useful index of the nature of poetic criticism we may expect. Let us consider these views expressed by the most representative men of the time. Addison, though ever a true son of Britain,¹ remains fair and temperate in his judgments of France. He states, on the one hand, that the French are England's most dangerous, implacable enemies, who, if they triumph, will reduce the British to the status of a lost people (*The Present State of the War*), and that the Hanoverian ruler is preferable to a Tory-pretender, for, ". . . we could never endure French sentiments, though delivered in our native dialect . . ." (*Freeholder*, No.

¹ *The Freeholder*, No. 1; Dec. 23, 1715: "As a British freeholder, I should not scruple taking place of a French Marquis; and when I see one of my countrymen amusing himself in his little cabbage garden, I naturally look upon him as a greater person than the owner of the richest vineyard in Champagne."

9). On the other hand, however, he refrains from any bitter polemics, and even praises France for her progress in certain arts.²

Quite the same may be said in regard to Dean Swift's attitude. Confident as he is of Marlborough's leading the English armies to victory, he declares "I do not love to see personal resentment mix with public affairs." (*Journal to Stella*, Letter 38; Jan. 1, 1711-12). The same winter finds him looking forward to a peace with France, without any expressions of a victor's glee, or triumph over the vanquished. Among his lists of great and admirable characters, he includes "Harry the Great of France" (*Of Mean and Great Figures made by Several Persons*) while among the "mean" lists he speaks of no Frenchman of greater importance than the Count of Bussy-Rabutin, guilty of no greater offense than that of having attempted to cut the gay figure of his youth, after a banishment of twenty years.

Throughout *Gulliver*, Lilliput represents England, and the land of the Blefuscians, France, Gulliver's escape to the latter country paralleling that of Bolingbroke to France in 1715.³ "And it must be confessed that from the great intercourse of trade and commerce between both realms, from the continual reception of exiles, which is mutual among them, and from the custom in each empire to send their young nobility and rich gentry to the other, in order to polish themselves by seeing the world, and understanding men and manners; there are few persons of distinction, . . . but what can hold conversation in both tongues." Englishmen of eminent rank, such as Lord Bolingbroke, and Matthew Prior

² *Dialogue on Medals*. III. "... the French medals come nearer the ancients than those of any other country, as it is indeed to this nation we are indebted for the best lights that have been given to the whole science in general."

³ *Gulliver*, Lilliput, Chap. 5, p. 55.

show themselves to be thoroughly familiar with France. In *Gulliver* again we find one of the few expressions against France, when, in a political conversation between Gulliver and the Prince of Brobdignag, this royal censor criticises England harshly. ⁴ "My colour came and went several times with indignation, to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France . . . the pride and envy of the world so contemptuously treated."

Charles Gildon, perhaps, is the most appreciative of France:

"Such equal tempers happy Gallia knows,
Such are the forms our kinder Heav'n bestows.
Far from the clime where sultry suns arise,
Far from the wintry north's inclement skies,
In the mid-space the queen of nations lies."

(*Complete Art of Poetry*.)

The more vociferously anti-French views are those of Steele, which we have noted in a foregoing section; and those of Pope. Pope, as we shall later see, though he may himself put into practice a French literary principle, is readier to attribute this to almost any accident of British development, than to French influences. We find in his *Essay on Criticism*, for instance:

"Thence Arts o'er all the Northern world advance,
But Critic-learning flourish'd most in France:
The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;
And Boileau still in right of Horace sways,
But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despis'd,
And kept unconquer'd and unciviliz'd;
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
We still defied the Romans, as of old.
Yet some there were among the sounder few,
Of those who less presum'd and better knew,
Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,
And here restor'd Wit's fundamental laws,
Such was the Muse whose rules and practice tell,
'Nature's chief master-piece is writing well.'"

⁴ *Gulliver*, vol. 8; p. 60.

It seems a satisfaction to Pope to "despise" French rules, and adopt those of the Ancients.⁵

In matters non-political, France exerted a marked influence on English fashions, manners, and customs, to the greater or less pleasure of the recipients. Addison comments on the French gallantry,⁶ airiness of humour, and emptiness of talk.

" . . . In France it is usual to bring their children into company, and to cherish in them, from their infancy, a kind of forwardness and assurance: besides that, the French apply themselves more universally to their exercises than any other nation in the world, so that one seldom sees a young gentleman in France that does not fence, dance, ride, in some tolerable perfection. These agitations of the body do not only give them a kind of mechanical operation on the mind, by keeping the animal spirits always awake and in motion. But what contributes most to this light airy humour of the French, is the free conversation that is allowed them with their women, which does not only communicate to them a certain vivacity of temper, but makes them endeavour after such a behaviour as is most taking with the sex." (*Remarks on Italy.*)

And further, in describing a character very à la française, "His speeches were accompanied with much gesture and grimace. He abounded in empty phrases, superficial flourishes, violent assertions, and feeble proofs. To be brief, he had all the French assurance, cunning, and volubility of tongue. . . ." (*The Trial of Count Tariff.*)

⁵ Again, from *Windsor Forest*:

"Still in thy Song should vanquish'd France appear,
And bleed forever under Britain's spear."

⁶ *Freeholder*, No. 4: "If any should allege the freedoms indulged to the French ladies, he must own that these are owing to the natural gallantry of the people. . . ."

Remarks on Italy: "The Genevois have been very much refined, or, as others will have it, corrupted by the conversation of the French Protestants, who make up almost a third of their people."

He comments upon the English following the lead of French fashions of various orders, principal among them being those of dress, dance, and the kitchen.⁷

These frequently mentioned French influences received attention as well from Pope, who comments upon the levity and restlessness of the French.⁸ (*Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. vol. 6, p. 136.) "There is one play which shows the gravity of ancient education, called the *Acinetinda*, in which children contended who could longest stand still. This we have suffered to perish entirely; and if I might be allowed to guess, it was certainly first lost among the French." Charles Gildon, the most favorable to France, because of his markedly pro-classic taste, perhaps, speaks of the influence of the "punctillios of French breeding" (*Laws of Poetry*, p. 267), and, with St. Evremond, regrets the hold which Italian opera had taken in London. (*Life of Betterton*.)

Some of the Cavaliers who had sought refuge in France, earlier in the seventeenth century, felt a second experience in direct contact with French thought currents, when a considerable number of French Protestants fled for religious liberty to England, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. According to Dr. Canfield, whose

⁷ Again (*Tale of a Tub*: Conclusion): "Well fare the heart of that noble Jesuit [Pere d'Orleans] who first ventured to confess in print, that books must be suited to their several seasons, like dress, and diet, and diversions; and better fare our noble notion, for refining upon this, among other French modes."

Tale of a Tub: ". . . for a certain lord came just from Paris, with fifty yards of gold lace upon his coat, exactly trimmed after the court fashion of that month. In two days all mankind appeared closed up in bars of gold lace."

⁸ As further instance:

"The sturdy squire to Gallic masters stoop,
And drown his lands and manors in a soupe.
Others import yet nobler arts from France,
Teach Kings to fiddle and make senates dance."

—*The Dunciad*, Bk. 4, lines 595-598.

thesis we have had occasion to cite before, Queen Anne's reign marks the highest point in the influence of the French classic plays in England. Although French was widely known and used, translations into English of these classics were much desired, and proved useful in spreading broadcast a knowledge of the French-classic elements, so all-important in the great literary controversy about to ensue. The quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns found its way across the channel early in the last decade of the seventeenth century. Although the anti-classic party was destined eventually to triumph in England, nevertheless the classicists stood their ground well, and were, if anything, more vociferous in their arguments. This controversy may be said to mark the beginning of the end of French literary influences, and the dawn of eminently British taste asserting itself without opposition.⁹ The influence of Dryden, according to Dr. L. J. Wylie, leans more towards classicism, and therefore towards French literary creeds, the only literary guides of his time being "the pole-star of the ancients, and the rules of the French stage amongst the moderns."¹⁰ Alexander Pope, representing the other ex-

⁹ L. J. Wylie, *Evolution of English Criticism*, p. 57: "The defects and virtues of the English classicism had an almost equal share in defining the progress of the next century. Its characteristic excellencies, the practicalness of its purpose, the definiteness of its thought, the lucidity of its expression were quickly perfected."

D. Canfield, *Racine and Corneille in England*, pp. 216-17: "The dedication of *La Thébaïde*, translated by Miss J. Robe, in 1723, as *The Fatal Legacy*, shows that the disfavor which was to fall upon later translations was already casting its shadow before."

¹⁰ L. J. Wylie, *op. cit.*, p. 41: "In spirit and method, Dryden brought the scientific thought of his time to bear on criticism; but other elements of his work, more conservative and temporary, were preëminently distinctive of the Gallic School."

(*Ibid.* p. 34) Here is developed Dryden's use of the preface influenced by the *Examens* of Corneille. The author judges

tremity of this controversy in point of time, and, according to the same author "the very high priest of English classicism, accepts classic standards only to ignore them at will."

The classic struggle that took place, then, between Dryden's day and that of Pope, with its immediate relation to French classic conventions, will form our main source for English criticism of French poetry. During this period the literary men of the day exerted a great influence on public taste. Addison's comment on the *Distrest Mother* in the mouth of Sir Roger de Coverly "is very artfully contrived . . . to forestall all the objections which the average Englishman would raise to tragedy so formal and Gallic in its spirit" (Canfield, p. 154). Further, continuing the same writer's comment on this translation, "No effort was spared by the Addison-Steele coterie to launch triumphantly a man who had written a classical tragedy, which they were trying to introduce on the English stage. . . ." ¹¹

The question of classicism against anti-classicism hinged mainly on the matter of rules for poetic, principally dramatic, writings. That the British genius inherently does not favor classic rules is evident by their fate. The artificial influences of the day, then, such as Dryden's defense of rhyme as "the metrical creed of the Classical school."

(*Ibid.* 15) "It is significant of his relation to the old age and to the new that Dryden should couple the authority of the ancients with the rules of the French authors."

¹¹ Canfield, *op. cit.*, p. 223. [On Cibber's *Cæsar*, from *Pompée*, which was not a success.] ". . . it is a very interesting symbol of the average attempt of that period to put French tragedy on the English stage. A play of the Elizabethan school [Fletcher's *The False One*] is forced into unnatural coalescence with one of the most classical of seventeenth century French tragedies, and the result is performed before an audience of the early Georgian period—a monstrous effort, whose failure is assured from the beginning."

the remembrance of Cavalier tendencies, and the thoroughly classic education enjoyed by the more prominent of writers, may account for the fact that the greater names lend their weight to the side of classic rules, the schooling and disciplining of natural talent, and (with but few exceptions) the value of criticism.¹²

Dean Swift speaks in favor of rhyme. In his *Advice to a Young Poet* he tells us that ". . . rhyming is what I have ever accounted the very essential of a good poet." Ang again, "Verse without rhyme is a body without a soul (for the chief life consisteth in the rhyme) or a bell without a clapper. . . ." ¹³ Pope, the "high priest of classicism," tells of his early acquaintance with a purist, Walsh, whose theories on the value of care and correctness in form so influenced Pope himself, that he was later able to write:

"Then polish all with so much life and ease

You think 'tis nature and a knack to please."

—*Horace, Book II, Ep. II.*

In the *Dunciad* he mentions a certain James Ralph, who "was wholly illiterate, and knew no language, not even French. Being advised to read the rules of dramatic poetry before he began a play, he replied—"Shakespeare writ without rules." " Ralph, who, Pope tells us, developed into a newspaper hack-writer, served as another of the object lessons that turned the great classicist in favor of the rules.¹⁴

¹² Swift, in *The Battle of the Books*, speaks of the malignant deity called Criticism, the child of Ignorance and Pride, who overflows with spleen, and gives wisdom to infants and idiots.

¹³ Swift composed a poem, *Bouts Rimés*, on Signora Domitilla.

¹⁴ *Essay on Criticism*. Yet James Ralph was by no means as ignorant as Pope supposed. He is the author of many works of a literary and historic nature, and, directly as well as by his writings, had no small influence upon Henry Fielding. Of interest to us is his *Taste of the Town, or a Guide to all Publick Diver-*

"Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy nature is to copy them."

Dependent on this schooling of genius through classic rules, is his next theory that the poet should be critic as well. He makes allowance, however, for the poetic licence accorded unusual abilities:¹⁵

"Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
And rise to faults true critics dare not mend."

Classicist that he is, Pope shows but little feeling for the Elizabethan drama. "Till then [Ben Jonson's time] our authors had no thoughts of writing on the model of the ancients: their tragedies were only histories in dialogue; and their comedies followed the thread of any novel as they found it, no less implicitly than if it had been true history."¹⁶

It is Charles Gildon who brings the classicism of France to bear as authority in his own pro-classic arguments. According to him, genius must have long schooling and practice; for even Ariosto and Shakespeare, greatest of imaginative geniuses, fall short of Homer, Euripedes, and Horace "in the judgment of the learned and knowing, who alone can decide upon this head." (*Laws of Poetry*.) He continues, later on:

"The noble author [Buckinghamshire] having fix'd the necessity of a genius in poetry proceeds to show that there is an equal necessity that this very genius to make it truly valuable, should be govern'd and regulated by judgment.

As all is dullness when the fancy's bad,
So, without judgment, fancy is but mad.

sions (London, 1731), a series of essays on music, poetry, dancing, mimes, audiences, masquerades, and athletic sports, revealing a by no means superficial erudition, and a cultivated appreciation. He too refers occasionally to French literary and critical standards.

¹⁵ *Essay on Criticism*.

¹⁶ *Preface to the Works of Shakespeare*.

The doctrine of these verses is not only extremely judicious, but of the greatest importance to the perfection of poetry, especially in this nation, where a flash of the wildest fancy in nature generally goes down for the most excellent poetry.¹⁷

And again:

"Of chosen words some take not care enough,
And think they should be, as the subject, rough.
This poem must be more exactly made,
And sharpest thoughts in smoothest words convey'd."
(From Buckinghamshire's *Essay of Poetry*.)

Furthermore, the English tragedy writers have been guilty "not only of a breach of all the rules of Aristotle, but even of those of common sense." Gildon upholds the unities, advocates the withholding of horrors from the stage, and offers the following definition of tragedy: "*A Tragedy is therefore an imitation of some one serious, grave, and entire action, of a just length, and contain'd within the Unities of Time and Place. . . .*" (*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 222.) His conclusion to the most important section of the *Laws of Poetry*, nevertheless, voices his doubt as to the success of his party. Their efforts, in the face of the ignorant and corrupt taste of the times, will be no more successful than "washing the Ethiop."

Up to this point, Gildon's classicism differs to no great extent from that of Pope. He strikes a new note, however, in admiring the French, in their classicism, as the natural heirs and descendants of the ancients. His authorities for taste, literary standards, and poetic principles are Greece, Rome, and France. Concerning the necessity of schooling genius, he asserts that the success of Corneille himself came *after* his adoption of Aristotle's rules, and adds that:

"No man certainly can condemn the reason of what

¹⁷ *Laws of Poetry*. On Satire, pp. 77-78.

we find in French; and yet it is the reason of the thing, and not the language it is written in, that makes it valuable. . . . What reason therefore has any man to object, as an odium, our consulting the French authors, when he, or his colleagues shall write like them? . . .” (*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 114.)

Concerning the rules that he himself advocates, he says: “ . . . I have borrow’d many of them from the French, but then the French drew most of them from Quintilian and other authors. Yet the Frenchman has improv’d the Ancients in this particular, by supplying what was lost by the alteration of custom, with observations more peculiar to the present age.” (*Life of Betterton*, Preface.)

And finally, concerning the unities, which assure an artistic reproduction of nature, and the violation of which turn poets into poetasters, and destroy the fable of a tragedy, “which cannot subsist without them,” he continues:

“Let us take France. . . . Are the regular pieces of that people more valuable than those which are irregular, and on the contrary? Are not Boileau, Racine and the like more entertaining to them than Alexander Hardy, duBartas, and the like? I think all France will give the prize to the former; and if so, how have the rules injur’d the poetical productions of France?” (*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 120.)

He admires Boileau and Madame Dacier particularly, and turns to Racine’s Preface to *Iphigénie* as authority for leaving horrors unacted. (*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 192.) The faults of French poetry, according to him, rest with the nature of the language, rather than with any lack of talent or art. “I must agree with his Lordship [Roscommon] that the French is soft enough, and perhaps may rival ours in that particular; yet certainly

English must be allow'd to be more copious, and more harmonious too than the French." (*Laws of Poetry*, pp. 292, 293.) As culminating point in his admiration of the French classicists, he declares that:

"If such enemies have arisen to the ancients in France, where there have been such eminent instances of good taste, it is no wonder that in England, where our taste is generally so bad, there should have been found men to appear in the same abandon'd cause." (*Laws of Poetry*, p. 11.)

Gildon does not favor rhyme. It is necessary neither in long dignified epics, or tragedies, nor yet in shorter poems, interfering, at best, with the thought, grammar and diction of the passage where it occurs. In this particular he cites two passages from the Earl of Roscommon to support his view:

"Of many faults rhyme is (perhaps) the cause
Too strict to rhyme, we slight more useful laws."
(*Ibid.*, p. 65.)

And again:

"At best a crutch that lifts the weak along,
Supports the feeble, but retards the strong."
(*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 328.)

He adds, of his own accord, that Dryden's use of rhyme, in *The State of Innocence*, renders it but weak and trifling in comparison with Milton's unrhymed treatment of the same subject. Gildon makes no especial mention of French rhyme, as distinguished from the principle of rhyme in general.

Before considering the actual opinions expressed on poetry at this time, let us stop a moment to see how Boileau was regarded. It is interesting to note the considerable amount of pro-classic opinion at this time, as compared with the views of a century later; for once the eminently British sentiment had asserted itself more completely, it turned with particular force against

Boileau. Addison manifests his approval of Boileau by comparing him to Horace.¹⁸ "Horace knew how to stab with address, and to give a thrust where he was least expected. Boileau has nicely imitated him in this, as well as in other beauties." John Oldham had imitated Boileau (in his satires and his Horation *Art of Poetry*) fully a generation before Addison and Pope. Among other interesting English works which reveal Boileau's direct influence, are Matthew Prior's famous *Parody of Boileau's Ode on the Taking of Namur*; and translations of works of Boileau's by John Ozell and John Oldmixon. Gildon cites him frequently as authority on the scope and form of the various genres treated in the *Laws of Poetry* and the *Complete Art of Poetry*. It is Pope however, who is most pronounced in his esteem of Boileau, an appreciation manifesting itself not only in occasional references and citations, but in open expressions of admiration.¹⁹ He writes to William Cleland, shortly after the appearance of the first edition of the *Dunciad*, ". . . Boileau, the greatest poet and most judicious critic of his age and country, admirable for his talents, and yet perhaps more admirable for his judgments in the proper application of them. . . ." He says, in the *Dunciad*, "The persons whom Boileau has attacked in his writings, have been for the most part authors, and most of these authors, poets: and the censures he hath passed upon them have been confirmed by all Europe."²⁰

¹⁸ *Dialogue on Medals*.

¹⁹ The following is one of the exceedingly rare passages from Pope which might cast a slur on Boileau: (*First Satire of Second Book of Horace, Imitated; Prefatory Word*.) "Besides, he deemed it more modest to give the name of imitations to his satires, than, like Despréaux, to give the name of satires to imitations."

²⁰ *Letter to Dr. Arbuthnot*, July 26, 1734: "You will not suspect me of comparing myself with Virgil and Horace, nor even with another court favorite, Boileau."

To a Noble Lord, Nov. 30, 1733: "Tho' you observe, I am but a mere imitator of Homer, Horace, Boileau, Garth. . . ."

He comments as well on Boileau's influence, in the *Essay on Satire* (lines 439-444) :

"More happy France; immortal Boileau there
Supported Genius with a sage's care:
Him with her love propitious Satire blest,
And breathed her airs divine into his breast:
Fancy and Sense to form his line conspire,
And faultless judgment guides the purest fire."

Having thus prepared ourselves by a study of the attitude of the times towards classicism and towards France's chief exponent of it, we are better ready to approach the opinions expressed on the poetry of France itself.

Outside of the views found in the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*, Addison has but little of value to say on the poetry of France. We may notice too in passing, that the developing spirit of the eighteenth century,²¹ with its interest in science and research, is beginning even thus early to divert from the field of poetry the attention of the majority of writers, with the exception of those

²¹ It seems rare at this time to find essays dealing with the arts, if not in a scientific way. We shall see that references to the poetry of France are concerned chiefly with questions of rule, or literary creed, and scarcely at all with the beauty of the poetry, regarded quite by itself. In the realm of science and criticism, on the other hand, we find many points of contact between the two countries, not least among these, the frequent use, in an English text, of French words. French methods of translation are spoken of, French learned treatises are referred to: French critics are not only mentioned, but frequently cited, chief among these being the two Scaligers, the Daciers, Rapin, Bossu, and Boileau. In the field of general reading other than poetry, we find an extensive acquaintance with Montaigne, Rabelais, Cyrano de Bergerac, Scarron, Molière, Perrault, Charron, Descartes, Gassendi, Balzac, Voiture, de la Rochefoucauld, LaBruyère, Malebranche, Bayle, Fontenelle, and still later, Voltaire and Montesquieu; and frequent references to French romances, and French writers in general.

actively engaged and interested in the classic struggle. Swift has not much of interest on the subject. It is worth recording that the entire *Journal to Stella*, extending from September 2, 1710, to June 6, 1713, contains not one mention of French poetry, dramatic or other. Steele's views are those that we have considered in our study of the early journal comment.

Pope, then, is the first of the critics of note to express himself without reserve on the poetry of France. Classicist that he is, he cannot but admire the French classic school. "In putting me into a French dress," says he, "you have not only adorned my outside, but mended my shape; and, if I am now a good figure, I must consider you have naturalized me into a country which is famous for making every man a fine gentleman."²² Of the earlier, non-dramatic poets, he mentions Ménage and Ronsard, although he considers the latter to have been in "utter darkness," through lack of classic doctrines, no doubt; he prefers Racan's lyric poems to his *bergeries*, and praises Malherbe for avoiding the disagreeable hiatus.²³

In regard to the poetic dramatists of France, Pope evidently admires them, though not without a tinge of regret that they do exceed the British in the production of works of art, if not in natural genius:²⁴

"Exact Racine and Corneille's noble fire,
Show'd us that France had something to admire.

²² *Letter to General Anthony Hamilton*, Oct. 10, 1713, upon his having translated into French verse the *Essay on Criticism*.

²³ *Letter to H. Cromwell*, March 7, 1709: ". . . I could not think it possible at all times to be avoided by any writer [hiatus] till I found by reading Malherbe lately, that there is scarce any throughout his poems."

And again, to Walsh, Oct. 22, 1706: "If I am not mistaken, Malherbe of all the moderns has been the most scrupulous in this point . . ." (i.e., in avoiding hiatus).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, note p. 267: "Mr. Waller . . . with the Earl of Dorset, Mr. Godolphin and others, translated the *Pompey* of Corneille, and the more correct French poets began to be in reputation."

Not but the tragic spirit was our own,
 And full in Shakespeare, fair in Otway shone:
 But Otway fail'd to polish or refine,
 And fluent Shakespeare scarce effac'd a line."
Imitation of Horace, Bk. II, Ep. I.

Again: (*Ibid.*, II, 263, 266).

"We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms;
 Her arts victorious triumph'd o'er our arms;
 Britain to soft refinement less a foe,
 Wit grew polite, and numbers learn'd to flow."²⁵

In the prologue that Pope wrote for Addison's *Cato*, he urges the British to strive to assume the place of eminence he would accord them:

"Britons attend: be worth like this approv'd,
 And show, you have the virtue to be mov'd.
 With honest scorn the first fam'd Cato viewed
 Rome learning arts from Greece, whom she subdu'd;
 Your scene precariously subsists too long
 On French translation and Italian song."

In spite of his admiration for classic rule and order, however, his British pride does triumph over his literary creeds when anything like a comparison is in view. In the conclusion to the *Essay on Man*, there is the following commentary in the notes, giving both a French translator's criticism on the *Essay*, and Pope's reply:

"'The French are not satisfied with sentiments however beautiful, unless they be methodically disposed: Method being the characteristic that distinguishes our performance from those of our neighbors.' It is enough

²⁵ *Ibid.*

"Or dubb'd historians by express command,
 T' enroll your triumphs o'er the sea and land,
 Be call'd to court to plan some work divine,
 As once for Louis, Boileau and Racine."

just to have quoted these wonderful men of method, and to leave them to the laughter of the public."

Nor is Pope's taste in verse forms essentially French. "I would also object to the irruption of Alexandrine verses of twelve syllables, which, I think, should never be allow'd but when some remarkable beauty or propriety in them atones for the liberty. . . ." (*Letter to Walsh*, Oct. 22, 1706).

To resume Pope's views, then, he is an ardent classicist and as such, he is willing to admire the results of his creed wherever they may appear, even if it be in the poetry of France. It is evidently less an admiration of the poetic abilities of the French themselves, and regarded quite by themselves, than of the continuation of classic tradition.

This is the attitude of all the writers of the time who favor French poetry. The Duke of Buckingham, favorable to the French poets in many respects,²⁶ considers the French language in its very nature incapable of fine poetry. In a letter to Pope, he prefers the French translation of Homer in prose, ". . . because to see it done in verse was despaired of: I believe, indeed, from a defect in that language, incapable of mounting to any degree of excellence suitable to so very great an undertaking." And again, speaking still of de la Motte, he considers him capable of being a good epic poet, "if the French tongue would bear it." The fact that he does not assign adequate reasons for such a judgment appears to indicate that there were others who would understand his decision without further proof.

Charles Gildon again is the one who expresses himself most favorably to the poetry of France;²⁷ and his views

²⁶ *Letter to Mr. Pope*: "M. de la Motte . . . already deservedly famous for all sorts of lyric poetry."

²⁷ *Complete Art of Poetry*, cited from Rowe, p. 141:

"The French, in language pure, in sense polite,
The willing reader to the task invite."

take on an added value when he declares his desire to be just, calling himself "too much of an Englishman" (*Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 232) to give other nations an advantage, did he not honestly believe it right to do so. He is evidently acquainted with French poetry before the seventeenth century, mentioning as he does, Marot and Pierre Larrivey:

"In Francis the First's time, 'tis true Marot and others flourish'd by the encouragement of that Prince. In the year 1597 Peter l'Ariveu publish'd comedies, written, as he tells us, in imitation of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the modern Italians. After him in France, Alexander Hurdy [sic] attempted tragedy, and his works were published in 1625, and him, not long after, succeeded the famous Corneille."²⁸

Gildon praises the French drinking songs, saying: "... It is remarkable that the French, who are a much soberer people in the general, yet have produc'd better songs on drinking than we have done." (*Ibid*; p. 176.) But his main interest and preference is the classic school. He tells us that:

"Father Rapin and Monsieur Hedeline, and the royal academy's censure of the *Cid*, were the first who began to meddle with Aristotle in the French language, and gave rise to a good taste in France, to whom Monsieur Bossu succeeded, and perform'd to a miracle upon the epic poem; and in our days Monsieur Dacier has exceeded all mankind upon Horace's *Art of Poetry*, and Aristotle's *Poetics*. Thus was a good taste establish'd throughout France." (*Laws of Poetry*, p. 53.)

From this and similar passages, we may gather that the English critics based the French preëminence solely upon their fidelity to classic doctrine, and not at all upon any superior poetic endowment.

²⁸ *Complete Art of Poetry*, p. 80.

Gildon staunchly defends the French theatre against the charges of Richard Steele—charges that we have already considered in our study of the more popular Journal criticism. In this attack upon Steele, without calling him by name, he speaks of him as “the mouth of a party and defender of a cause, that is only considerable for the number of its partisans.” (*Laws of Poetry*, p. 178.)

“The mouth of this popular party,” he continues, “is a certain gentleman who, by the contribution of the wit of his friends, and his own peculiar genius (if I may give it that name) in agreeable trifling, a few years since wrought himself into an opinion with the multitude, that he was an author of great importance, and consummate judgment, and made use of this vogue to run down and ridicule all art and science. . . . He speaks indeed magnificently of them both [Greek and Roman tragic poets] and would be thought only to attack the French stage, not considering that whilst he condemn’d the tragedies of France, for a point in which they exactly agree with those of Greece and Rome, he must inevitably involve those in the same condemnation.”

We have considered in part the original attack of Steele (Cf. Chap. II, p. 59, of this study); let us see what remains for Gildon to refute.²⁹

²⁹ Steele, *The Theatre*, No. 2, Jan. 5, 1719-20: “Nations are known as well as private persons, by their pleasures, and the general inclination cannot be understood by any circumstance so well as by their diversions. In France they are delighted either with low and fantastical farces, or tedious, declamatory tragedies. Their best plays are chiefly recommended by rigid affectation of regularity, within which the genius is cramped and fettered, so as to waste all its force in struggling to perform a work not to be gracefully executed under that restraint; they fall into the absurdity of thinking it more masterly to do little or nothing in a short time, than to invade the rules of time and place, to adorn their plays with greatness or variety: thus they are finical, and mechanic, when they would highly please; and when they

Gildon undertakes to answer formally the charges of Steele against the classic stage of France. First, if the diversions of a nation are to be the index of its people, then the English will be regarded as "extremely ignorant" since their own spectacles are barbarous and scandalous, absurd, confused, and immoral. Steele's statement that the French are delighted with low farce is "absolutely false": and he offers as proof the plays of Corneille, but recently translated into English, and those of Molière, "to the translation of which our English stage has been so much beholding." Whereupon he accuses Steele of harboring an entirely false view of French tragedy in general, for Racine's are neither tedious nor declamatory,

"... but what he charges upon them is so far from being a defect, that it is the highest perfection. I mean their regularity, in which they are upon a foot with the Greek poets. . . ."

This regularity in no way cramps genius, and is no hindrance to it: it by no means restrains Sophocles or Euripedes, who are the models of the French regularity. The next step is to defend doing "little in a short time," because it is more masterly through its greater probability, and far more reasonable than huddling a confused crowd of accidents together, which method, the English claim, gives variety. Variety, indeed, is so far from being rebellion against the rules, that it is only to labour for admiration, they have it for performing what they might better have deserved, if they had neglected." After references to Spain and Portugal he continues, "Among us there is no part in human life, but in one play or other is represented with propriety and dignity, from the greatest prince to the meanest slave; and often the same great spirit is one character running through all the changes in fortune, etc."

be found in them. As for the greatness of a play's being injured by a close adherence to the three unities, there is time enough to answer that when any of the "libertine interludes" attain the height of the regular pieces of Sophocles or Euripides. As the final step in his proof, he gives, in English, the entire quarrel scene between Agamemnon and Menelaus (from the *Iphigenia* of Euripides) as substantial evidence of the value of the unities and other rules of classic creed. Although this defense is avowedly made as one of the French stage, it contains in reality nothing that is not dependent upon, or better, the result of, the *classic* elements of the French stage: and not a defense of some element essentially native in its development, as, for example, the rhyme or verse form.

As we have already seen, Gildon advocates a strict adherence to the classic rules, and praises the French for carrying them out. He speaks, for instance, of the unities of time and place, and of the practice of evading them by causing houses and other immovable objects to be moved about, which "... involves the spectator in confusion, which is not always remov'd by the lame help of the painted scenes, the change of which is unknown to the present French stage, as it was to that of Athens." (*Laws of Poetry, Drama*, p. 175.) Defending the principle of suppressing scenes of horror, he continues: "... The active or dramatic poem makes use of narration to give an account of things not proper to be presented . . . the French tragic Poets indeed, after the reformation of their stage, have been pretty nice in this particular."³⁰ At another time, he praises Richelieu, the greatest statesman since Augustus, for bringing the French standards of poetry almost to the level of the Roman. In Gildon too, we find the unusual instance of an Englishman's refusing to consider English poetry

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

superior to French. In discussing Roscommon's *Essay of Translated Verse*, he says that:

" . . . tho' I am as willing as any man to think well of my country, yet I must needs say, that the advantage we receive from this judgment [Roscommon's contrast of French and English poets] will not reach all our poets; as it will not be over all the French: for Boileau, I fancy, will very well bear an exception; and I am very sure, that Racine has excell'd most of our tragick writers."⁸¹

Gildon's praise of French poetry alludes only to its classic features. He does not favor rhyme, nor the French verse form; nor is he enthusiastic about the poetic qualities of the language itself. He too, then is representative of the classicists who admire classic tradition where they find it. Finding it in the classics of France, they admire her poetry, not for any glowingly excellent qualities of its own, but for continuing the creed to which they hold.

Impossible as it is to confine literary movements exactly within the limits of dates, we must, in studying the classic struggle of the early eighteenth century, consider as well the works produced on this subject during the last six or seven years of the decade immediately preceding 1700. These studies, too, aid us in shedding light upon the manner in which French poetry was regarded in England.

Besides those classicists whose opinions we have noted, there remain for our study Edward Bysshe, Thomas

⁸¹ Another example of this rare tendency is furnished by Edmund Johnson, in the prologue to his *Sultaness*, translated from Racine's *Bajazet* in 1717:

"Why then should Britons, who so oft have broke
The pride of Gaul and bow'd her to the yoke,
Be blamed if they enrich their native tongue
With what the Gallick Muse has greatly sung?"

Rymer, Sir Thomas Pope Blount, Sir William Temple and his valiant opponent William Wotton. Bysshe's views are to be found in his *Art of English Poetry*, composed wholly for the bettering of English poetry, and little concerned with poetry in general. The work abounds in citations from the ancient classics, and from English authors. In the preface Bysshe gives us a clue to his views by citing Boileau,³² in his insistence on the necessity of absolute truthfulness in poetry. He deals not at all with dramatic poetry, confining himself to the rules for the composition of lyric and narrative poems. For these, he strongly advocates the use of rhyme, giving full and generous rules for employing it properly, and laying down as chief considerations, the "seat of the accent" and the pause, or hemistich, dividing the line into two halves. Indeed, he appears to take for granted that poetry and rhyme are one; for in the forty pages devoted to the rules of verse forms, he allows thirty-seven for rules on rhyme, and a scant three for those on the "Pindaric Ode and Blank Verse." He draws attention to an inherent difference between the French and English rhyme schemes,³³ and in "heroick" verse favors the Alexandrine:

"The verses of twelve syllables are truly heroick, both

³² Preface:

"Rien n'est beau que le vrai. Le vrai seul est aimable;
Il doit regner partout; et même dans la fable.
De toute fiction l'adroite fausseté
Ne tend qu'à faire aux yeux briller la vérité."

—*Art Poétique*.

³³ (*Ibid.*, p. 24.) The Latins, he comments, including the Spanish and Italians as well as the French, will not allow "that a rhyme can be too perfect"; and with such an end in view, they permit compounds of words to rhyme with the original words themselves, and the same word with the same spelling to be used in the rhyme, provided the sense is different. "But this is not permitted in our poetry."

in their measure and sound, tho' we have no entire works compos'd in them; and they are so far from being a blemish to the poems they are in, that on the contrary, when rightly employ'd, they conduce not a little to the ornament of them. . . ."

Thomas Rymer, like Pope, is first the classicist in his poetic views, and as such, he admires classic doctrines where he finds them. It is classicism he lauds in the poetry of France, and less, the poetry itself. It is he who evinces a most interesting knowledge of pre-classic poetry in France, his knowledge going back as far as the *Roland*. To prove the eminence of English poetry "notwithstanding the present flourish and ostentation of the French theatre," he declares:

"... we find the British poetry to this day. . . . The First William came, singing Roland, to fight that decisive Battel which wan him England."

In the same spirit, and to the best of his knowledge, he corrects an error concerning the French singers that Richard Lionheart brought with him; he cites Roger Hoveden to the effect that King Richard "enticed over from France singers and jesters, to sing of him in the streets—

et de regno Francorum Cantores et Joculatores allexerate
ut de illo canerent in Plateis, et dicebatur ubique quod
non erat talis in orbe."

He continues, "That these songsters and jesters were brought from France is most false. France had no pretensions thereabouts in those days. Those countries were Fiefs of the Empire. Frederick I had enfeoffed Raymond Berenger of the county of Provence, Forcalquiers, and the places adjacent, as not long after, Frederick II install'd William au courb nez, Prince of Orange, King of Arles and Vienne; which family had formerly possessed Provence. As truly he might have said they were

brought from Spain, for Idlefonso, King of Aragon, Count of Provence, Barcelona etc. had given and settled on his son this county of Provence." (*Short View of Tragedy*, pp. 67, 68.)

Apart from such patriotic digressions, Rymer is to a degree (and indeed, a degree greater than most of his contemporaries) acquainted with early French poetry. He cites a song of Jeffry Rudel's in connection with a mention of the influence of Provençal poetic conventions (*Ibid.*, pp. 71-72), and a passage from Villon (*Ibid.*, p. 107).³⁴

Furthermore, he offers an interesting, (if not exactly precise) account of the development of the French stage (*Ibid.*, pp. 53-63). He refers to a company of "Strolers" presenting the Passion and other sacred scenes, in a manner "as to set all the audience laughing. Francis the First, by whose encouragement Letters had begun to flourish in France, and Poetry more particularly, by the means of Clement Marot (who then translated the Psalms and sent abroad his Balades, which Campanella reckons to have ushered in Heresie) King Francis, I say, was much delighted, for want of better, with these Strolers . . ." Next he refers to Peter Larrivey; and "After him Alexander Hardy attempted Tragedy, whose works were published ann. 1625. Not long after succeeded the famous Corneille, who began to write for the stage after Hardy's model." He lauds the example of encouragement given to the developing theatre by Richelieu, who fostered higher literary standards by refusing to permit "Aucunes actions mal-

³⁴ "Se fusse des hoirs Hue Capel,
Qui fut extrait de boucherie,
On m'eut parmy ce drapel,
Fait boire de l'escorcherie."

The same work of Rymer's contains sundry references to Rabelais.

honnêtes, ny d'user d'aucunes paroles lascives, ny a double entente, qui puissent blesser l'honnestete publique." ³⁵

In points of good taste, therefore, the French are delicate and commendable, and "The noble encouragement they met withal, and their singular application have carried them very far in the improvement of the drama."

Rymer praises the French for their adherence to the three unities, and quotes Corneille, (from the *Examen de Mélipe*) as having discovered the unity of action through common sense. He praises their further introduction of classic elements in the form of Racine's choruses.³⁶ The elements of French tragedy, however, that are not classic he treats with markedly less enthusiasm. With a "wild-goose chase of romance in their heads . . . some scenes of love must everywhere be shuffled in, tho' never so unreasonable." The Greeks, furthermore, never turned tragedy into opera, nor allowed their love "to come whining on the stage to effeminate the majesty of their tragedy." He is not in favor of the French use of rhyme, since the sense of the passage and not the sound should fill the minds of the listeners; and the verse form, the long Alexandrine, with its middle-stop, is troublesome, along with the rhyme.

Blount, too, manifests this classic-yet-British attitude. He declares, for instance, that since the Romans, "none have carried poetry so high in all points as the English . . ."; and quotes from Dryden that the French dramatic writers, depending upon a thin design, few

³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Epistle Dedicatory*: Further, "The world, surely, other matters apart, owes much to Cardinal Richelieu for his encouragement to the Belles Lettres. From thence we may reckon that we begin to understand the Epick poem by the means of Bossu; and Tragedy by means of Monsieur Dacier. . . ."

³⁶ (*Ibid.*, p. 1.) He is hopeful for new reformation since ". . . in France they see the necessity of a chorus to their tragedies."

episodes, few personages, and less sublime thoughts; and following the ancients too closely in point of rule and order, do *not* excel the English; whereupon he fills out his essay by citing Rapin at nearly every turn, and Boileau almost as frequently, with Dacier well in evidence. He does, however, cite Dryden in praising French taste,³⁷ and comments upon the wide reaching influence of the French tongue:

“Were our language as generally known to the world . . . as the French is now, her verses [Mrs. Philips’] could not be confin’d within the narrow limits of our islands.”³⁸

Of non-dramatic poets, Blount praises Marot;³⁹ in speaking of the delicate writings of Anacreon, Catullus, Sappho, he says:

“These are all great Models of this character; of which the French have only in their tongue Marot, Gentleman of the Bed-Chamber to Francis the First. He had an admirable genius for this way of writing; and whoever have been successful in it since, have only copied him.”

And though he seems to favor Corneille, yet he takes his place among those who deem the French language too feeble and lacking in strength and sinew for fine tragedy. The over-long Alexandrine, the too-regular pause, and the use of rhyme contribute towards accentuating this natural inability.

Sir William Temple speaks of the polish and refine-

³⁷ *On Poetry*, p. 61: “Dryden says, it is worth our consideration, a little to examine how much the Hypercriticks of English poetry differ, in their dislike of heroick poetry, from the opinion of Greek and Latin judges of antiquity; from the Italian and French who have succeeded them; and indeed, from the general taste and approbation of all ages.”

³⁸ *Characters and Censures* (Mrs. K. Philips).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70.

ment of the French language,⁴⁰ qualities, however, which detract from its former vigor.

"I doubt it may have happened there," he continues, "as it does in all works, that the more they are filled and polished, the less they have of weight and strength, and as that language has much more fineness and smoothness at this time, so I take it to have had much more force, spirit, and compass in Montagne's age."

Though he leans toward the Ancients, yet he reproaches the French for being "too exact and too strict in their rules, to very little purpose," since the Ancients need no improving upon, and since their additions have produced little that rivals the works of the Ancients themselves. Of the earlier poets, he mentions Ronsard as meeting much applause in his day. Of later dramatists, he allows Molière to stand as the only foreign writer possessing *humour*, in his famous discussion of the purely English qualities of this trait: but even Molière "has too much of the Farce to pass for the same with ours." (*Of Poetry*.)

John Dennis, Steele's valiant opponent, knows very well

"that we have greater geniuses in England than they have in France, and that we can shew better writers; but that they can shew more good writers than we, no man who knows them can doubt." (*The Impartial Critick*.)

William Wotton, apparently Sir William Temple's bitterest adversary in the Classic struggle, recognizes an improvement in the French language through Richelieu's efforts, but deems it nevertheless unsuited to tragedy.

⁴⁰ *Of Poetry*: ". . . the French wits have for this last age been in a manner wholly turned to the refinement of their language, and indeed with such success that it can hardly be excelled, and runs equally through their verse and their prose."

Though the French, since Richelieu, “. . . have taken so much pains to make their language capable of all those beauties which they find in Ancient authors,”⁴¹ yet “The French language wants strength to temper and support the nobler parts of poesie . . . though the French nation wants no accomplishment necessary to make a poet . . .”⁴² He calls attention, further, to a difference in French and English rhyme schemes, rendering them unfit for the same orders of poetry, the French accenting their words, for the most part, on the last syllables, the English on the foregoing ones.

Again we must conclude that any favorable leanings towards French poetry were caused by an artificial stimulus; the rise, at this time of pro-classic views. In this case, where the presence of classic rule is the very feature that recommends French poetry to its English judges, instead of being the reason for disapproval, we find it censured for its verse forms and rhyme, together with its fundamentally unpoetic medium of expression, which three factors represent the essentially native factors in French poetry as opposed to classic influences.

From our study of the criticism of French poetry from Dryden's day through Pope's, we may conclude that the underlying stock-British sentiment towards the poetry of France is not a heartily favorable one. The period of the Restoration, and that of the classic florescence, half a century later, are epochs of artificial stimuli, one political, the other literary, which tended to sway the eminently British feeling from its normal course. The proof we have to offer for such a judgment is, first, the eventual triumph of anti-French poetic conventions, in spite of the temporary vigor of these two forces; and secondly, the underlying *popular*, as contrasted with the aristocratic or very learned currents of taste, manifesting

⁴¹ *Reflections on Ancient and Modern Learning*, p. 46.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

itself during these periods of artificial stimulus. In the earlier time we find this element represented by a minority party of Pepys' stamp; in the later, by the journals, which, while never anti-French (this being due in many cases to the classic tendencies of their chiefs), were less sympathetic to French poetic conventions than were the specialized works of learned writers.

The reasons for admiring French poetry, then, were first in the nature of political considerations, when French fashions of nearly every type rushed into England in attendance upon the returning court and the Cavaliers; and, secondly, literary reasons growing out of an artificial creed in poetry, rather than out of the heart of the people of England themselves through their own development. On the other hand, the main reasons for disliking the poetry of France were also, in the first place political. The intermittent feelings of hostility that had existed for centuries between the two nations would naturally tend to establish relations that could not be either cordial or admiring. Often, in the very periods we have been considering, a manifestation merely of *fairness* of judgment may be regarded as something unique. Along with these political considerations—for we cannot feel that these, however great their influence undoubtedly was, are solely responsible for differences of literary appreciation between the two countries—are those differences of racial genius and temperament which are difficult of explanation on any other grounds. The inherent genius of England that has asserted itself through Shakespeare and Milton, is undeniably a different genius (leaving out of the account any question of superiority) from that of Corneille and of Racine. And this difference must inevitably be taken into consideration in reaching the conclusion that in an estimate and appreciation of poetry, the English cannot be ardent admirers of the French. The prevalent weight of expressed

literary criticism will naturally move with the current of the times in which it is expressed. Therefore, while we do find a considerable amount of criticism that is decidedly appreciative of the poetry of France, and while we must appraise it highly for all that it represents, we are not mistaken in interpreting it less as the representation of true British feeling than as the resultant of exceptional national and individual conditions.

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